- Gregg Easterbrook on the end of nature
- How Ralph Nader screwed up your car insurance
- Bud McFarlane's original sin

The Washington Monthly

OCTOBER 1989/$3.00

Why higher education is neither

America's rotten to the core curriculum

— Jason DeParle and Liza Mundy

— John Heilemann

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The Washington Monthly

Volume Twenty-One, Number Nine — October 1989

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LETTERS

Retiring minds

Thanks for the piece on government pensions ["A Pension for Trouble," Matthew Cooper, July/August]. A couple of days after reading the article I learned of a 69-year-old city employee who received a promotion and in less than a month had retired. His pension increased from $26,362.44 to $27,116.40, a gain of $753.96. Have you ever considered a worst city or state official award?

MARK WELCH
Antioch, Tennessee

The average civilian federal annuitant, according to the Office of Personnel Management, receives only $13,573 a year, and a surviving spouse gets just 55 percent of this amount. Secondly, those persons receiving large annuities (former congressmen, judges, and senior executives, not to mention erstwhile presidents) comprise less than one-half of 1 percent of all civil service retirees and are calculated into the national total. There are by far more clerk-typist annuitants living at and below the poverty line.

Contrary to the implications of your article, the average federal annuitant did not leave government service in his/her fifties. A Government Accounting Office study covering a 10-year period showed the average age of retirement from civil service to be 61.1. The average age of retirement from the private sector is 61.8. If the average federal retiree lives to be, say, 76, then his annuity earnings would be something like $203,595 and not the inflated figure of $718,000 you reported. I might also add, federal retiree annuities are fully taxed both as to the employee and government contributions.

Finally, you further discredit your case by trotting out the hackneyed Hastings Keith, ex-congressman and about ex-everything else. He perfectly illustrates the abuse of power of Congress and not the Civil Service Retirement System. It is his ilk who makes the pension rules for themselves. No other rank-and-file federal retiree can collect five different pensions nor even legally attempt to do so. Just the less than one-half of 1 percent alluded to earlier. Please don't try to make a case with the monumental exception.

H. T. STEVE MORRISSEY
Washington, D.C.

Mr. Morrissey is president of the National Association of Retired Federal Employees.

The author replies:

I acknowledged the problem of poor retirees. I also demonstrated that early retirement is real and expensive. Just one example: 343,000 federal retirees in their fifties receive full benefits. That $203,595 figure might be "something like" accurate—but only if you exclude the compounding effect of COLAs. Of course, these benefits are taxed; they're income. Finally, Hastings Keith has denounced the excessive benefits enjoyed by both his colleagues *and* many top-grade civil servants; with equal ire, he has stuck up for the less well-off. It's an example worth emulating.

Class distinctions

Enough is enough. For years I have suffered in silence while nonacademics blather about the mythical overpaid, underworked faculty. But my blood pressure really rose when I read it in your "Tilting at Windmills" column [July/August]. How could a publication which I applaud monthly for its fearless and refreshingly sensible analysis of numerous matters lambaste a large group of scholars by citing one (that's right, *one*!) example?

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The term "faculty" encompasses tens of thousands of scholars from hundreds of disciplines. Yes, some faculty in areas such as engineering, real estate, economics, biology, and psychology are lucky enough to be well-paid, and are still luckier to work in disciplines that are currently marketable. The rest of the "faculty bigshots," in such traditional fields as English, philosophy, anthropology, and social work, can't sell their services to a market, or a government, interested only in an obvious return on their dollar. And faculty pay scales reflect that thinking (or lack thereof)—salaries are low because scholars have nowhere else to go with their unmarketable skills.

There are some trends in higher education that seem to have escaped you. Tuition is rising, but tuition increases are not set by faculty members, and as such are often fought by faculty members (many of whom, given the demographic aging of the group, are currently paying college tuition for their own children). Furthermore, you could have noticed that the increase in undergraduate admissions has greatly surpassed the increase in the number of newly hired faculty members. Translation: class sizes are increasing, more classes are being added, and the work load for faculty members is increasing.

TERRI KETTERING
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Postal modernism

I'm sure the July/August issue will provoke plenty of post office stories to add to your file ["Why Americans Love Letter Carriers and Hate Postal Clerks," Jason DeParle] and here are a couple more:

A foreign-born couple was ahead of me in an interminable line. Finally it was their turn and the clerk weighed their parcel and then growled, "My postage machine is broken and I sure can't put $37 worth of stamps on this! You'll have to try the other window." So they obediently turned around and went to the end of the line. The clerk with the broken machine was standing three feet from his colleague, but he couldn't ask him if his machine worked. . . or slide the package over for him to affix the postage meter amount.

Not long ago I was 16th in line watching the clerk at the closed window enjoy his donut and horse around with the multitude in the back who always seem on coffee break no matter what time I go. They throw out barbed remarks to the one clerk who is working, not caring, apparently, that 16 people in line are much more annoyed by the remarks than is that one clerk. A second clerk—the one at the Philatelic Center window—is not on coffee break. She just stands and stares at the 16 of us who want to buy regular stamps, not the chocolate stamps or gold tone stamp pins in her domain.

Because of my job, I spend a lot of time standing in lines at post offices. Sometimes I think the worst part is that congressmen, talk show hosts, and media pundits don't suffer such indignities. Those in the fast lane just call Federal Express.

SUSAN OHANIAN
Schenectady, New York

The Washington Monthly

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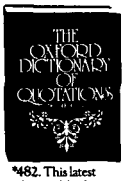

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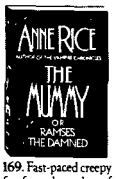

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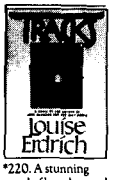

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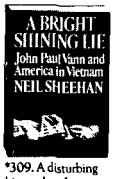

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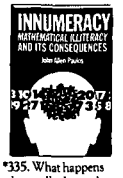

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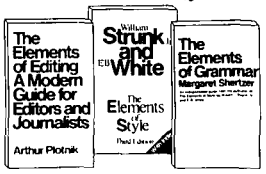

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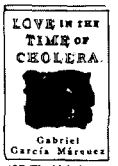

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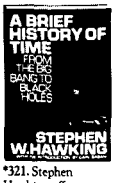

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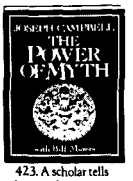

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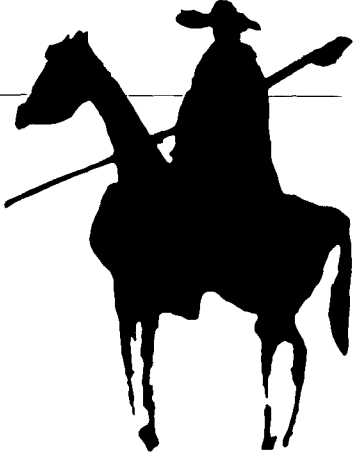

To help commemorate our 20th anniversary year, we have gathered together some of our favorite items from "Tilting at Windmills" over the years.

"As much as I have empathy for the visually handicapped, I don't believe I can support this," said Alan Lasee, a member of Wisconsin's state senate. Guess what he was talking about? A bill to permit the blind to hunt deer and other game.

"Do we really want people out there shooting guns when they don't know where they're shooting?" the senator asked. His logic, although compelling to me, failed to persuade his colleagues, and the bill passed. If you are planning to travel in rural Wisconsin during the game season this fall, you may derive some comfort from the law's stipulation that the blind hunter must be accompanied by someone who can assist in sighting the weapon. But as I contemplate the possible dialogue between hunter and sighter—"Point it this way, George. . . . over to your right. . . down a little bit. . . no, not that far! Well, I guess Rover was getting pretty old anyway"—I think I'll go to Minnesota instead. . . .
—*October 1988*

The article by Lew Wheaton was datelined "Georgetown, Guyana (AP), Nov. 21." It began, "Survivors of the Jonestown cult suicide, menaced by flesh-eating piranha fish and other deadly perils of the jungle, eluded searching soldiers in the impenetrable Guyanese wilderness." The story went on to mention "a jungle filled with swamps and electric eels." Wheaton mercifully failed to include "the hordes of man-eating jaguars" featured in some of the other dispatches from Georgetown.

All of these stories were typical of what Third-World veterans call missionary journalism. Missionaries used to stimulate the generosity of the parishioners back home by exaggerating the hardships of life in Africa or Latin America. A cleric comfortably sipping his gin and tonic on the terrace of his home in Kenya, gently caressed by 70-degree breezes in one of the world's most pleasant climates and looking at some of the world's most beautiful scenery, would write letters home that would bring tears to the eye, and cash to the collection plate, in a rural church in Mississippi, where the congregation would be sweating in 99-degree heat and 99-percent humidity. I remember my first much-dreaded trip to "the steaming jungle" of Central America. I found that much of Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala was infinitely more pleasant than Washington in the summer, and I resolved to return whenever I could— remembering, of course, to give a martyred sigh to my colleagues as I departed. . . .
—*January 1979*

One thing about conservatives that drives me to distraction is their tendency to assume that rich people are smart and virtuous and that the poor are stupid and shiftless. The truth is that some poor people are poor precisely because they are virtuous. Some others have simply had bad luck. And some rich people are stupid and have become rich only because of good luck or because they are *not* virtuous. . . .
—*August 1988*

A small victory was won last month in the struggle against mindless credentialism. This question was dropped from the District of Columbia's examination for taxi drivers: "All but one of the following words describes a person who displays a low dominance: 1) a follower; 2) agreeable; 3) competitive; 4) persuasive."

Someone finally realized that knowing about low dominance has nothing to do with knowing that it takes a left turn from Key Bridge to get to Canal Road. So how did the question get into the test in the first place? And how many others like it are keeping good people from getting jobs in the many fields where such tests are used?. . .
—*September 1987*

The Iran-contra hearings ended without answering the question that has nagged at me the most: Which of the geniuses in charge of our national security affairs

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recommended that Ronald Reagan send the Ayatollah an inscribed Bible?. . .
—*December 1987*

There has been a disturbing similarity in the performance of the White House press corps and the White House staff during the past four years. The press thinks it is getting at the truth when it takes whatever information the administration hands out, and then asks tough, hostile questions at White House press conferences. The bright young lawyers on Stuart Eizenstat's staff have tried to run the government in a similar fashion—by poring over the data and decision memoranda handed up from the various departments, and then subjecting a few senior officials of those departments to skeptical questioning.

Behind both these approaches is the Perry Mason Fallacy—the idea that a smart lawyer who "asks the right questions" can extract the truth from the person he is cross-examining, even when that person doesn't want to tell it or doesn't know it. In fact, cross-examination alone is seldom sufficient, because it still leaves the questioner helplessly dependent on the questionee for his information. A truly effective questioner makes sure he has independent, firsthand knowledge against which to test the answers he gets. The best trial lawyers don't rely on courtroom questions alone to uncover the truth—they go out and interview witnesses beforehand, getting a personal sense of their credibility. Remember that Mason and Paul Drake spent the first 40 minutes of every show investigating the facts on their own.

For the press, really uncovering the truth would require reporters who spent less time being nasty to the president and Jody Powell, and more time asking questions at the working level of government to find out if the White House knows what it is talking about.

And for the White House, really running the government would require staff members to develop lines of communication to the levels of the bureaucracy below the top echelons, so they could find out for themselves which assistant secretaries were telling the truth, which programs were working, which tanks and missiles weren't.

Unfortunately, this sort of digging is hard work. It is much more glamorous to ask those tough questions in an elegant White House room, where it's always warm in winter, cool in summer, and as far as possible from what's really going on. . . .
—*November 1980*

Members of Congress took 426 foreign trips last year. I'm sure you assume they visited the other most important countries in the world—Russia, China, and Japan—and such trouble spots as Lebanon and Central America. But four countries in western Europe came in ahead of Russia. China ranked ninth, just behind Spain. And the Caribbean resort island of Barbados beat out Lebanon and every country in Central America. . . .
—*November 1986*

For all my friends in the bar who feel I'm sometimes too severe in my criticism of lawyers, I offer the following evidence of the profession's high-mindedness. It is a brochure sent to lawyers around the country headlined "Rainmaking." It advertises a "practical, shirt-sleeved seminar" on how "you can successfully market your professional services." Among the subjects on the seminar agenda are "Putting potential clients in a buying mood" and "Building client loyalty and dependency."

The latter represents the sickest aspect of the practice of law. The ambitious lawyer knows the way to get ahead is to make affluent clients think they can't live without him. He manipulates their fears and insecurities until they are firmly in the habit of consulting him before they go to the bathroom. . . .
—*June 1985*

To give you an idea of how the District of Columbia spends its public school budget, here are some titles of its employees. There's a Community Coordinator and a Community Organizer, an Attendance Aide, Attendance Officer, and an Attendance Counselor, an Assistant for Research and Assessment and an Assistant for Research and Planning, an Employee Counseling Assistant, an Employee Counseling Specialist, an Employee Development Specialist, an Employee Relations Assistant, and an Employee Relations Specialist, not to mention an Interagency Liaison and the clearly overworked Position Classification Specialist. . . .
—*June 1989*

If you doubt that the American legal system serves the rich, consider the case of the paper bag versus the leather pouch. The U.S. Court of Appeals has held that paper bags may be searched without a warrant, but that your belongings are immune from warrantless search if you keep them in a zippered leather pouch. So be sure to get a Gucci for your gun. . . .
—*November 1980*

I still have difficulty facing up to what I saw when I first visited Gettysburg. Having been reared by parents whose family loyalties

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lay with the Confederacy, I looked upon Robert E. Lee as ranking only below God—who, since my parents were also Democrats, I pictured as FDR. Anyway, as I stood looking at the field Pickett was ordered to charge across and saw the obvious dominance of the Union position, I remembered that Longstreet had said something to Lee along the lines of, "Look Bob this is madness. Call if off," after which Lee ordered the charge to proceed. If there's a message to this reminiscence, it is love your heroes, respect what they accomplished, but face their failures. It just might help you deal with your own. . . .
—*May 1979*

The current discussion about removing restraints on the CIA reminds me of the 1950s, when the talk was about unleashing Chiang Kai Shek, and the image evoked was of an efficient military machine straining at its shackles, ready to leap across the Formosa Strait and devastate the Reds. The catch was that in prior engagements with the Communist armies, the Generalissimo's forces had a batting average of around .150.

The situation at the CIA is not unsimilar, only its average may be a bit lower. Recall its wrong predictions—that the Shah was secure in 1978, that Vietnam would not collapse in the spring of 1975, that war would not break out in the Middle East in the fall of 1973—and the grotesque mixture of evil and clownishness that characterized its assassination attempts.

There is always the argument that it's better to assassinate a Hitler than to fight a World War. That sounds persuasive, but my guess is that if we'd had the CIA in the thirties, it would have tried to assassinate not Hitler, but Marshall Tito, General DeGaulle, and Count von Stauffenberg. By 1944, of course, when von Stauffenberg carried his bomb-filled briefcase into a meeting with Hitler, the CIA's parent agency, the OSS, was in action. Of this we can have no doubt. Who else would have moved the briefcase *away* from the Fuhrer the precise distance necessary to let him escape?. . .
—*April 1980*

Two problems of downtown Washington—and, we are told, of other American cities—are excessive bank robberies and excessive numbers of banks and savings and loans. The crime problem is well known; the numbers problem has come about because no one else can afford to pay the rent for the ground floors of the expensive new buildings going up all over the place. Why not enact a law requiring all banks and savings and loans to be on the top floor? This would free the bottom floors for interesting shops and restaurants. It would also present robbers with a problem, for after they had scooped out the cash drawers and dashed out the bank door they would find themselves in a hallway where they would have to wait for an elevator or run down 12 flights of stairs. . . .
—*July/August 1977*

If there is anything good about the war between the pro- and anti-abortion people, it is the way that it illustrates that people do not have to have a pecuniary interest to get involved and work hard on behalf of political causes they believe in. . . .
—*December 1977*

In the renewed concern about chemical and biological weapons, which I mostly applaud, I hope people won't forget that not all such weapons are necessarily evil. My favorite example is one that to the best of my knowledge has so far appeared only in the James Bond film *Goldfinger*—a 24-hour nerve gas that knocks the enemy out for a day but leaves them otherwise unharmed. Since I favor winning international disputes without killing people, as we did with the Berlin Airflift and the Cuban Missile Crisis, it seems to me that the 24-hour nerve gas would be a dandy weapon indeed. . . .
—*March 1989*

The president has a $149 million jet aircraft that will serve as his command post in a nuclear war. It is designed to fly above the holocaust so that the president and his top commanders will be sure to survive a nuclear attack. While on a recent test flight, the plane was forced to return to its base. The hazard that kept it from remaining airborne was geese that were sucked into one of the plane's engines.

Although this event may have inspired anxiety at the White House and the Pentagon, I take great comfort in it. I have always thought that, next to the possibility of some fool pushing the wrong button accidentally or some similar foul-up, the greatest danger of nuclear war lay in our leaders thinking they could survive it. Now they know that even if they escape the blasts below, they still may be done in by a gaggle of geese. . . .
—*February 1988*

To an astonishing degree, modern social life has come to center on the work place. The highly mobile nature of American society that has cut most of us off from our roots means that, especially in large cities, the tie that binds is the workplace, where friendships are formed and around which social life is centered. In

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Washington, the government agency is usually that place.

The Pentagon is the supreme example. It has, as a recent article by Bernard Trainor in *The New York Times* pointed out, clubs for sailing, skiing, hiking, bowling—even spelunking—as well as computer user groups and employee travel tours. The courtyard in the center of the Pentagon on a sunny day is, according to one official, "like a town square in Mexico. All the singles and divorcees are out there eyeing one another as they try to line up a happy hour date."

There is so much that is good about this that one dislikes pointing out the downside, but it is real and it is a problem for the rest of us. Pentagon employees and those of other government agencies don't have enough contact with the rest of the country. This isolation makes them confuse the national interest with that of their own bureaucracy. The result is that the civil servant in the Bureau of Mines thinks more about the welfare of his fellow bureaucrats than he does about the welfare of the coal miners, and the Pentagon GS-15 worries more about increasing the defense budget than about reducing the size of the deficit that his fellow citizens are going to have to pay off. . . .
—*July/August 1988*

During the National Women's Conference in Houston, Bella Abzug was quoted as looking forward to the day when women have equality and "men will have to compete a little harder." This reminded me of what has been my greatest disappointment with the women's movement. Instead of making men more feminine, it has made women more masculine. I didn't want men to be feminine in the sense of dainty or petite. I wanted them to become gentler, kinder, less macho. What I had liked most about the unliberated woman was that, not having to compete with men, she could look on the male's aggressions and career anxieties with sanity and humor. Now, instead of changing the system, she's joining up.

One profession I had especially hoped women would change is the law. They have been entering it in record numbers during the seventies, but the adversary system, with its emphasis on competition and winning, remains unchanged. The old female values could have brought a badly needed shift toward more harmonious ways of resolving disputes that would emphasize mediation and bringing people together.

None of the foregoing should be construed to suggest that I am against women's right to work. I support that right totally, including the right to perform in combat roles in the armed forces. I know a lot of women who are in much better physical condition than I was when the United States Infantry found me acceptable. But again one yearns for the old female values. Large numbers of women with those values in the military could be a great insurance policy against My Lais. . . .
—*January 1978*

Don't Say Anything Bad About the Good Guys is one of the fundamental principles that guide American liberals. They argue that if, for example, you say one union is corrupt you will give ammunition to the enemies of all unions. Another recent example of Don't Say Anything Bad About

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the Good Guys came from the reaction of some black liberals to Bill Moyers's television special on the black family. They argued that Moyers shouldn't have shown Timothy, a young black male, bragging about the girls he had made pregnant and not caring about supporting their children. Moyers, the argument goes, lends aid and comfort to the Reaganites and to those who hate blacks when he reveals such unpleasant facts. But if we don't face the facts, however unpleasant, how can we have government programs that are based on reality?. . .
—*March 1986*

Most murderers are too young, too stupid, or too crazy—at least at the moment of the crime—to be deterred by the fear of their own death as punishment. But some criminals are smart, sane, and mature.

This was true of roughly 20 percent of those I represented while I was practicing law. They are capable of being deterred, but only if they think it is probable that they will be arrested and convicted and that their punishment will be severe. For those who prefer life, even in prison, over death, it seems clear to me that the death penalty could be a deterrent. The catch is that they know the criminal law enforcement system is so inefficient that their arrest and conviction is almost never a probability.

This is why I think those who want to be tough on crime should stop wasting their time arguing for the death penalty. Their first priority should be to improve the law enforcement system to the point where conviction is the probable result of any serious crime. . . .
—*March 1986*

The CIA has proposed a bill to punish disclosure of classified information. This will probably be perceived by the left as a threat to freedom of the press, as indeed it is probably intended to be by the administration. But have no fear as long as one section remains in the bill. It says that those accused can escape conviction if the documents were not "properly classified."

The fact is that there are few government documents that are not overclassified. When I worked in the Kennedy-Johnson administration, we routinely classified material as "Confidential" simply because it might embarrass some bureaucrat.

I am indebted to Richard Halloran of *The New York Times* for an example of the absurd heights the classifiers reach every day. It is a paragraph taken from a memorandum setting out the objectives for the Navy's 1968 budget. It reads:

"The Navy must continue to attract and retain sufficient numbers of high-quality, skilled, and motivated people. Compensation and quality of life improvements must be competitive in the job market. Ways must be found to reduce requirements for administrative functions, reduce personal turbulence, and permanent change of station moves."

The paragraph was classified "Secret." . . .
—*May 1985*

In White House press briefings, moments of candor are rare indeed, but one occurred in January when a group of Pentagon bureaucrats was brought to the White House to meet reporters on defense budget issues, including the Star Wars program. When an official was asked how Star Wars could escape Gramm-Rudman, he replied:

"The budget as a whole might shrink, but programs that one wishes to protect within it can be protected by simply asking for more than you must have."

Now you just don't give away the game like that in Washington. Robert Helm, the Pentagon's comptroller, rushed to the microphone to denounce the bureaucrat's statement as "ridiculous and absurd."

The truth is that the practice of padding budgets to provide a cushion against possible future cutbacks is widespread, if not universal, in the federal government. . . .
—*April 1986*

Many of the finest Washington lawyers came here because they dreamed of working in government. They started their careers with a government agency. But then they left, convinced they needed to make enough money in private practice to afford to return to government later on. But each year, as their earnings from private practice rose, these lawyers found that there were fewer and fewer government jobs appropriate to their present station in life. How could a man earning $350,000 a year accept a role below the cabinet or at least the sub-cabinet level?

The tragedy is that there are thousands of interesting and challenging government jobs that these people would enjoy filling if it weren't for the injury to their sense of status. And the salaries paid by these jobs—mostly in the $60,000 to $80,000 range—permit a comfortable, if not lavish, life in Washington, especially if they put the kids through school while they were pulling in all that loot at the firm. Of course, if the family has grown accustomed to a Jaguar and a BMW, a Taurus and an Escort are going to seem like a step down. But why not take it, why

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not get into work that's interesting and worthwhile instead of boring or morally marginal, as is the case with most of the work in private practice? . . .
—*December 1988*

Have you noticed the inconsistency of the administration's positions on Nicaragua and South Africa? It says cutting off trade with South Africa would be bad because it would hurt the people, not the government. With Nicaragua, on the other hand, it argues that an embargo will not hurt the people but will bring down the government. . . .
—*July/August 1985*

Good news from Africa. Glenn Frankel of *The Washington Post* reports that socialism is on the decline. When I was travelling through Africa for the Peace Corps in the 1960s, one of the most striking facts about the educated elites in the former British colonies I visited in Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya was their unquestioning acceptance of socialism and their scorn for entrepreneurship. This was especially distressing because among the men and women of such tribes as the Ibo, the Ashanti, and the Kikuyu, there was often a lively spirit of enterprise and talent for it. But instead of building upon these aptitudes, Africa went largely for socialism. The resulting economic wreckage has been dismaying. In 1962 the per capita incomes of South Korea and Ghana were the same. Today the South Korean is five times greater. . . .
—*July/August 1985*

Paul Thayer, the deputy secretary of defense, was once a Navy pilot. So a few weeks ago, in response to criticism the F-18 has received from many sources, including this magazine, he decided he would take it out for a trial spin himself. As he prepared to land, the nose wheel wouldn't go down. When this problem was solved and he finally put the plane down, the brakes didn't work. Mr. Thayer is still with us only because there was a very long runway. These stories are amusing, but I wonder why they don't produce shame and anger at the Pentagon, and among the contractors who take its money—shame, anger, and a determination to do things right. . . .
—*April 1983*

A few weeks ago, *The Washington Post* revealed that, during his campaign for reelection, Mayor Marion Barry had been seen in a nightclub that features unclad female dancers and is located in a Washington neighborhood where choirboys definitely do not gather.

The mayor defended himself by saying he was there only to pick up a campaign contribution. But my experience as a participant in and observer of public life has left me with just the faintest suspicion that contributions from such places are sometimes related to protection from raids and other forms of unwarranted police interference with private entrepreneurs who just might occasionally encourage the girls to roll their customers. I wish the mayor had said, "I just wanted to see those naked women." . . .
—*June 1983*

Donald Couture was convicted of murder by a Connecticut jury. The evidence showed that during a robbery he had killed three men by shooting them in the back. The state supreme court said that the evidence against Couture was "overwhelming." Yet it overturned his conviction. Why? Because during the trial the prosecutor had called Couture "a rat," "a murderous fiend," and "a merciless killer."

Here is another case where questionable behavior by a law-enforcement official—in this case very mildly questionable behavior—is used by a court to revoke conviction of a clearly guilty criminal. When guilt is clear, why don't we rebuke or penalize the offending official but keep the criminal in jail where he belongs?. . .
—*December 1984*

Conferences and conventions have become the number one growth industry of America today. Our favorite convention has to be the notary publics'. To appreciate its full attraction, you should realize that all the professional knowledge required of a notary can be communicated in somewhere between 15 and 30 minutes. Here is an excerpt from the conference brochure, headlined "The Notary Public in the 1980s":

"Come join us for the 2nd Annual National Notary Association Conference & Excursion—May 15-23, 1980—whose backdrop will be exciting Miami Beach and the beautiful rum-and-sun-soaked Bahamas.

"Miami Beach also provides a unique opportunity to broaden your notarial and legal horizons. . . sharpen your professional skills. . . expose yourself to the newest procedures and practices of notarization. . . meet the National Notary Association's innovative executives and notarial experts. . . explore the technological advances that are rapidly changing the Notary profession. . . and have the time of your life doing it all. . . .

"U.S. Treasury regulation

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#1162.5 permits an income tax deduction for education expenses. . . .

"Every delegate to the Conference will receive a National Notary Association Certificate of Attendance signifying completion of all Notary workshops and other Conference activities.". . .

—*February 1980*

Soon after Howard Jarvis started the Proposition 13 movement in California, this magazine published an article called "The Fireman First Principle," which warned that the clever bureaucrat's response to such budget-cutting efforts is to threaten to fire essential employees while protecting the unessential ones. This is because the bureaucrat knows he is much more likely to get his budget restored if that seems necessary to bring back employees who perform vital functions. Here is a headline that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* a few weeks ago: "Jarvis Pushing New Initiative to Restore Pre-Prop 13 Fire, Police Funding Levels." . . .

—*February 1980*

The righteous prejudice against the politician and in favor of the career civil servant is one of the things that has long maddened me about the conventional, respectable establishment mind. If we are going to truly reform the American system of government, we need more politics rather than less: more good people running for office and helping other good people run for office. If you never again want to face a choice between a Jimmy Carter and a Ronald Reagan, you must make sure you have a lot more people to choose from, a lot more good people pursuing political careers.

This in turn means offering decent rewards for a life in politics. Today a person who starts out in politics has a very tiny field of opportunity: congressman, senator, governor, and just two thousand federal appointive positions. But what if we opened up hundreds of thousands of federal jobs to political appointees, replacing as jobs come open through normal attrition, roughly 50 percent of the federal government's 2.8 million civilian employees? Give the new people two-and-a-half-year appointments, with a limit of five years on the time they would be permitted to remain in government. This would:

1) Bring people with real world experience into government.

2) Attract a different kind of person—risk-takers who are not interested in job security and who would be less cautious and self-protective than civil servants.

3) Provide a legitimate reward for political participation and thus attract more people to political activity. (You can still have minimum standards just as in the civil service. So no matter how hard your sister Susie had worked in your campaign, she still wouldn't get that government typing job if she couldn't type 40 words a minute.)

4) Send back to the nation as members of the voting public literally millions of people who have personal knowledge of how the government doesn't work, of the reforms that are needed to make it function, and of how to bring them about.

Because you could see the difference they would make, I think you would be much more concerned with the president you elect. Remember, the last president who did great things was FDR. And he hired, not the two thousand employees recent presidents have been able to choose, but two and a half *million*. We don't have to go that far, but it does suggest the direction in which we need to travel.

All this is not to say that I think the career civil servant serves no useful purpose. If I felt that way, I wouldn't advocate retaining half of them as I do. They provide institutional memory and potential whistle-blower insurance against the excesses of the politicians. All of these are valuable roles. But we also need people with other virtues, the kind of people short-term appointments would attract. Most of all we need to provide the incentives that will attract people who can revitalize our political system. If we don't want a system that runs on money, then we have to offer something else. What is better to offer to the people who push the doorbells and hand out the leaflets than the opportunity to participate in putting into effect the programs they have campaigned for?. . .

—*May 1982*

The Census Bureau has reported that government programs provide $10.70 out of every $100 received by Americans as income. Are you muttering about welfare cheats? Well, mutter again. Only 60 cents of the $10.70 goes for welfare. But a whopping $9.30 goes to Social Security and pensions for retired federal, state, and local employees.

Did you know the average retired federal civil servant is paid back all he contributed to the retirement system within 18 months after he retires? The average Social Security recipient gets back his contribution, plus his employers', plus interest, within about three years. The rest of the cost of Social Security and public employees' retirement is paid for by, guess who, you and me and all the other taxpayers. . . .

—*April 1986*

They're busy reorganizing over

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at the Small Business Administration. Regional Directors will now be called Area Directors. In the Johnson administration, they were called Area Administrators, with the next level down called Regional Director. Under Nixon, the Area Administrators became Regional Directors and the Regional Directors became District Directors. Now you understand how Washington really changes with each new administration. . . .
—*November 1979*

The Supreme Court has voted that a state can require appointees to a public agency regulating a profession to belong to a specified private organization. What the Court is saying is that a state can require that doctors be regulated solely by members of the AMA and lawyers solely by members of the ABA.

Michael Pertschuk, chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, recently pointed out that "personal expenditures for lawyers, physicians, dentists, and other professionals are increasing at a rate faster than the average for all goods and services in the economy." One of the reasons, Pertschuk said, was state licensing of professionals, a process often dominated by the profession.

Our answer to this problem is to have a complete exchange between the governing boards of the ABA and AMA. Then we would have doctors monitoring lawyers and lawyers monitoring doctors. No two groups are more aware of the abuses of which each is guilty or more skeptical about the real need for the surgery and the litigation they respectively encourage. . . .
—*April 1979*

Of all the things that went down the drain with the demise of the counterculture, zen pong is the loss I most regret. In case it escaped your notice, it was a version of ping pong in which the object was for two players working together to see how long they could keep the ball going back and forth, playing well but not trying to defeat each other. To me, the worst aspect of American culture is its vicious competitiveness. Why on earth can't we gain our satisfaction from doing what we do as well as we possibly can? Why do we also have to beat the shit out of the other guy? I don't think we do—I still like zen pong. . . .
—*March 1979*

The people who work for regulated public utilities are compelled to play a shell game. To potential investors they must say look at our profits, we're a good investment. But when the regulators come along, they have to hurriedly shove the cash into the closet and say, "What profit?". . .
—*February 1979*

Many people, having read Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters*, will tell you how much we need another Martin Luther King today. They are right of course. But even more, I think, we need King's forerunner at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Vernon Johns. Johns could make his congregation, the black elite of Montgomery, nervous when he wore muddy shoes or sold fish and watermelon on the side. He upset them even more with his attacks on their attachment to status and privilege above work.

"He accused them of persisting in the white man's view of slavery—that labor was demeaning—when Negroes should know that it was oppression not labor that demeaned them. On the contrary, the desire to avoid labor had enticed whites into the corruption of slavery.

"He named," Branch continues, "the Alabama State business professors and challenged the congregation to name an actual business to which any of them had ever applied himself. Business was beneath them, Johns said derisively. And farming was too dirty. In order to make something worthwhile they would have to take risks and immerse themselves among the common people, and this, he said, was the step they were least willing to take."

Most members of the black elite continue to prefer the safety of prestigious jobs in the professions or large corporations to the risks of entrepreneurship, which could provide jobs and opportunities for other blacks. And because the black elite is much larger today, the problems Johns described are much worse. And because too many of their former white oppressors, whom they still emulate, continue to value status and prestige above work, this country is losing the international economic competition.

And because too many members of the black and white elite are too preoccupied with climbing higher on the status ladder, they are failing to lend a helping hand to those down below.

Johns had another bone to pick with snobbery at his church. The organist looked down on the spirituals Johns loved. I was similarly tormented at the First Presbyterian Church in Charleston, West Virginia, by a series of choir directors who were choosing hymns that demonstrated their good taste instead of the rousers I loved like "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus" and "Lead On Oh King Eternal.". . .
—*April 1989*

—*Charles Peters*

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Apocalypse Then

Like any good journalist, Time's *Robert Sam Anson decided to get out of the office. But he didn't expect to have a North Vietnamese gun put to his head while he dug his own grave.*

by Robert Sam Anson

One of Lon Nol's internment centers was at Takeo, a provincial capital 60 miles south of Phnom Penh and scene of some of the bloodiest opposition to him in the spring of 1970. In the vicinity, the government was taking no chances. A force of three paratroop battalions had been sent to the province, and all of Takeo's Vietnamese men and boys, a group of perhaps 250, had been placed under guard in a pavilion immediately adjacent to a large soccer field. Hoping it would lessen the possibility of anything happening to the Vietnamese, my stringer Tim and I made it our business to visit the detainees every day after the morning briefing.

One day, Tim and I dawdled over lunch, and it wasn't until half past two that we finally got under way. With half a bottle of wine under my belt, I took it easier than usual on the trip south. Tim was grateful for the slower pace, and with the even temper the Cambodians had been in the previous day, there didn't seem any need to rush.

As soon as we glimpsed the soccer field pavilion, though, I knew that something was wrong. Before, we had always seen the Vietnamese milling about, stretching themselves or leaning over the building's low walls. Now there was no activity; the pavilion seemed abandoned.

"Something's not right," I said as I swung onto the field. "We should be seeing something moving."

I stopped the car a few dozen yards from the pavilion. As we got out, I heard a strange buzzing sound. "What's that noise?" I asked.

Instead of answering, Tim began to run. The sound I had heard was the beating of flies, thousands and thousands of them.

When I reached the pavilion, Tim was leaning over one of the walls; the ground beneath his feet was carpeted with cartridge casings. I looked over, then sagged against him. "Oh, my God," I said.

The bodies were piled one atop the other in huge pools of coagulating blood. At first I thought that everyone was dead. But as we mounted the pavilion steps, nearly slipping on the congealed globs that had washed over them, I saw several forms move and heard the sound of moaning. Reflexively I started counting; two dozen men and boys were still alive, lying in the midst of perhaps three times as many corpses.

Tim knelt beside an old man whose side had been torn open; he was holding on to it with his left hand to keep his intestines from falling out. "Where are the others?" Tim asked in French. "There should be more."

"They took them away," the old man gasped. "Last night, on trucks, after they killed them. To the river, I think."

One by one I began checking on the other wounded. They were in awful condition, and some,

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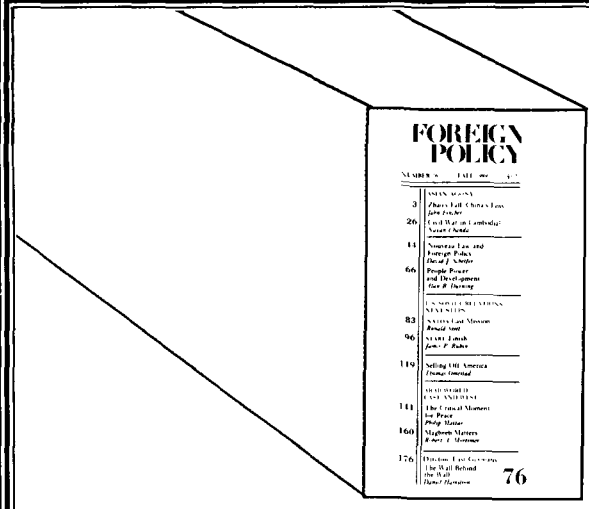

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like a man of about 30 whose right eye had been obliterated by a bullet, didn't look as if they would survive much longer. As I attempted a sort of triage, mentally dividing the least injured from the worst and paying the most attention to those who fell somewhere in between, Tim was on the other side of the room asking questions.

> The soldier poked his rifle into my stomach, then pointed in the direction of a trail that lead into the jungle. With a squad of Vietnamese ahead of and behind me, I started towards the trees, away from the car, and away from everything I'd known.

"They came at 8:30 last night," a man told him weakly. "They told us to lie down, that it was time to sleep. Then they started firing. From over there, from behind the walls." He waved his hand toward the spot where I was crouching.

"Three times more during the night they came back. Each time there was shooting. But except for the last time, always from behind the walls. The last time, it was the middle of the night, they came inside. They walked around slowly, shooting us. Then they came with the trucks."

The man, whose legs were nearly severed, apparently from automatic weapons fire, reached out for Tim's arm. "They say we are all Viet Cong, but we are only shopkeepers. You must take us away or tonight they will kill the rest of us." He brought his palms together in supplication. "Please, you must take us."

By now I was kneeling next to a boy of about eight. His face was chalk-white. I laid my hand on his chest; I could barely feel it rising and falling. Pulling back a bloodied sarong from around his torso, I saw a line of half a dozen holes extending from his hip to his ankle.

"We gotta get this kid outta here," I yelled over. "He's already lost a lot of blood."

"What about the others?" Tim called back.

"We'll get the reporters in Phnom Penh. They'll take them back. Right now we gotta take care of this kid."

Tim nodded, and gently I slid my arms under the boy's body. When I lifted him from the floor, he let out a groan and reached his arm around my neck. He was still clinging to me when I laid him in the back seat of the Cortina.

We covered the distance back to Phnom Penh without stopping. At a government checkpoint on the city's outskirts one of the soldiers fired his gun in the air in warning. I screeched around the next corner and started picking my way along side streets. Tim was holding on to the boy's hand. "Is he alive?" I asked. "Just step on it," he answered.

A few blocks later we saw a Catholic church. Tim ran in and got a French priest who directed us the rest of the way to Calumet, a French-run hospital not far from the Royal.

There was some bickering about who would pay for the boy's care, but finally the nurses allowed him inside. Presently a doctor appeared.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "Who are his parents? Do you know this boy has a gun wound?"

I quickly explained the circumstances, adding that there were two dozen other wounded at Takeo who needed treatment. "Will you take them? I'll pay, but there may be trouble with the government. They're all Vietnamese."

The doctor looked insulted. "Of course we will take them. We are French."

I told Tim to bring the Cortina back to Takeo as soon as he knew the boy was going to be all right, then ran the few blocks to the Royal. "Down at Takeo," I panted. "They're shooting the Vietnamese. Get the others."

"Let's get going," I said. "When it gets dark, the Cambodians will finish them."

Dig deeper and die

One afternoon several weeks later, at the Royal Hotel in Phnom Penh, with the exception of a mournful-looking Voice of America reporter, whom I found lounging poolside, the hotel was deserted. "Where's everybody gone?" I asked.

The VOA guy shrugged. "Skoun, I guess. Some kind of battle up there. Didn't you hear about it at the briefing?"

Vaguely, I recalled some mention of Skoun at the morning briefing, but what exactly was said about the market town 40 miles to the northwest I couldn't remember. I stretched and considered taking a dip. It would be refreshing after such a long lunch. Then I remembered I'd left my bathing suit behind.

"Shit," I muttered. "I guess I'll go down there, too." The VOA man didn't look up.

Since I'd given my driver Seng the rest of the day

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off, I'd have to take the Cortina, but that was okay. I liked the car, which reminded me of the first one I'd had as a teenager, and it wasn't often that I had the chance to drive it without Tim along bugging me to slow down.

My plan was to take a brief look around the town, buttonhole whatever correspondents were on the scene, then head back in time for dinner. It was going to have to be a quick trip; the ferry across the Bassac shut down at six, and with Khmer Rouge and NVA in the area, I didn't want to be stuck on the wrong side of the river after dark.

The Cortina's tiny engine began to whine. When the speedometer touched 120 km, I kept it there and started counting the red and white kilometer road markers the French had erected decades before: Skoun 18. . . Skoun 15. . . Skoun 12. . . Skoun 9. At Skoun 6 I began looking for the Pepsi-Cola truck convoys of the Lon Nol army. Two more kilometer posts passed; the convoys were nowhere in sight.

It was then that I saw them: a dozen or so men dressed in dark green fatigues, pith helmets, and rubber sandals in the tree line on the left side of the road. Some of them had leafy branches stuck in their helmets; all of them were armed with AK-47s. Instinctively, I waved. They appeared startled but waved back. At last, I thought, the Lon Nol troops.

Within a hundred yards the truth began to dawn. Lon Nol's army didn't wear pith helmets. And they most certainly didn't wear Ho Chi Minh sandals.

"Christ!" I cursed and skidded the car to a halt. I got out and looked back in the direction from which I had come. Half a mile down the road I could see the soldiers, who were now strung out in a picket line across the highway. Even at this distance I knew they were North Vietnamese.

I scanned the ruined town, searching for a friendly face. But there weren't any faces. There'd been a battle here, all right, and the other side had won.

I crouched behind the Cortina's fender and tried to think. I couldn't stay here, and to get back to Phnom Penh I would have to retrace my route, which meant running the picket line down the road. The soldiers had seemed nervous. Maybe if I floored it, drove the car straight at them, they would scatter before getting off a round. It was a long shot, but I couldn't come up with anything better.

Reaching into my wallet, I pulled out the laminated "noncombatant" card I'd been issued by MACV. In the event of capture, it was to be presented to "the detaining authorities," who, provided they could read English, understood the Geneva Convention and weren't troubled by the seal of the U.S. Department of Defense emblazoned on the card's face, were supposed to "afford the bearer the same treatment and privileges as a major in the U.S. Army." I tore up the card and buried the pieces by the side of the road. The work took several minutes. I couldn't get my hands to stop shaking.

As I got back into the Cortina, I stole a quick glance down the road. The soldiers hadn't budged.

Number One wasn't interested in banter. He had a stern look on his face. "The Front has made its decision," he announced.

Cautiously I turned the car around and headed toward them, slowly at first, as if I were planning to stop. Then, when they were perhaps 50 yards away, I punched the accelerator. The Cortina's engine sputtered an instant, then caught. I saw one of the soldiers begin to swing up his AK. I ducked beneath the dash as a burst of full-automatic blew over the roof. A second later I slammed on the brakes.

By the time I got the door open, the car was surrounded by Vietnamese waving their rifles at me. As I raised my hands, several soldiers I hadn't seen came swinging down from the trees on vines. One who looked no more than 15 landed at my feet. He seemed as terrified by me as I was by him.

"*Bao-chi*," I tried to say. "*Bao-chi*." I was telling him that I was a journalist, but the words came out as a whisper.

The youngster pointed his rifle at me, motioning me in the direction of the tree line, from which dozens of soldiers were rapidly appearing. I guessed I was in the midst of at least a company of troops, possibly even a battalion. At the tree line, two older soldiers pushed me to the ground and took my wallet and watch; a third yanked off my shoes and socks. "*Bao-chi*," I protested. "*Bao-chi*."

Grabbing my arms, the soldiers pulled me to my feet and started shoving me in the direction of a freshly dug foxhole. I guessed what they intended and started struggling. It was useless. They pitched me feet first into the hole, then threw a small trenching tool in after me. Dig deeper, they gestured.

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I dug for perhaps 20 minutes, but it was hard to keep track. My mind was filled with a jumble of things—how I wished they'd kill me on the road so my body could be found; how I'd let down my kids and my wife; how I wanted to be shot in the chest, not the head, since somehow the latter would be worse; how fucking stupid I'd been; how fucking scared I felt. Mostly how fucking scared.

Another soldier moved forward and shouted at me to stop. I passed him up the trenching tool and closed my eyes. I felt the heel of his foot against my chest, pushing me against the edge of the hole, then the coldness of his AK being pressed against my forehead. I began saying the Hail Mary.

Above me I heard the metallic click of a weapon being locked and loaded. In the next instant I felt a warm stream of urine go down my leg. Then something strange swam into my head, the memory of a movie I'd seen months before with my wife in Singapore. It was about the war and its title was *Hoa-binh*, the Vietnamese word for "peace."

"*Hoa-binh*," I whimpered. Then louder: "*Hoa-binh. . . Hoa-binh!*"

"*Hoa-binh*," I heard a voice above me repeat. The coldness against my forehead disappeared. I felt arms reaching down and pulling me out of the hole. I opened my eyes and looked into the face of the soldier who a moment before was going to kill me. He was studying me, as if trying to decide whether I meant it.

"*Hoa-binh*," I said again, pleading.

The soldier poked his rifle into my stomach, then pointed in the direction of a trail that lead into the jungle. "*Di*," he commanded, telling me to go. "*Di, di-mau.*"

With a squad of Vietnamese ahead of and behind me, I started toward the trees, away from the car, away from the hole, away from everything I'd known.

For the next several days, Anson is forced to march with his captors, with only short rest periods.

We moved out again a few minutes later; by truck first, heading north, then after an hour or so, on foot, in a westerly direction through thick forests and creeper vines. By the time dawn began to break, we were miles from the nearest paved road.

At the edge of a large paddy field divided by earthen dikes, a village appeared. In the half-light I could make out what seemed to be a school; a covered pavilion not unlike the one at Takeo, though half the size; a score or so of houses built on pilings and arranged around a large courtyard, just as at the previous village, and at the base of the courtyard the inevitable whitewashed wat. The only immediate sign of life was a few chickens scratching in the dirt beneath one of the houses. As we came closer, two mixed platoons of Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge suddenly stepped from the tree line backing the wat. They had been perfectly concealed.

There were four dozen of them, all with Sihanouk badges pinned to their shirts. The Vietnamese, however, were substantially better armed. In addition to the AK-47 and several grenades each was carrying, they had a light machine gun, a small mortar, and three B-40 rockets. The Khmer Rouge were equipped only with bolt-action Czech-made SKSs. The disparity left no doubt about who was in charge.

After a few minutes of conversation I was turned over to the village garrison. As my former guards marched back in the direction from which we had come, the platoon leader motioned me up the stairs of the farthest-away house. Five other Vietnamese followed me in. The rest went off with the Khmer Rouge.

Robert Kennedy, that is

From the doorway of the house's second story I saw two rooms. The smaller one to my left seemed to be for cooking and storing supplies; the larger one to my right contained a pair of battered wooden chests, a low, straw-mattress bed set up against the wall, and several hammocks strung from support posts. From the look of things, the Vietnamese had been here for a while. As the ropes binding me were loosened and I was directed to the bed, I guessed that I would be, too.

I slept fitfully all that day and, after a dinner of rice and vegetable soup, went back to bed for the night. I was not so much weary as depressed.

The sound of a cock crowing and the smell of cooking awakened me in the morning. There had been two arrivals overnight. Both were substantially older than the other Vietnamese, and from the deferential way they were being served breakfast, I presumed they were officers.

The younger of the two—he appeared to be in his late forties, while the gray hair and deeply lined face of his companion put him in his sixties—spotted me watching him and walked over with a plate of rice.

"I didn't know Americans liked to sleep so much," he said in English. "You must be hungry. Eat something. Then we'll talk."

"Are you an officer?" I asked.

"Only a soldier in the revolution, as we all are. But, yes, I suppose you could say I was an officer."

"You speak very good English."

My compliment seemed to please him. "I learned it so I could write propaganda leaflets for your troops. But enough for now. Please eat. You will need your strength."

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I took the plate and started pushing down handfuls of rice and salty-tasting bits of smoked fish. When I finished, the Vietnamese filled up my plate again. After the third helping the interrogation began.

The officer wanted a complete record of everything: background, family history, education, names and ages of children, extracurricular activities in college, occupation and hometown of wife, stories I had worked on before coming to Asia, and in as much detail as possible the identity of all the places I had been to in Indochina and the dates I had visited them. The officer jotted down my replies in a notebook; only twice did he make any comment.

Once was when I told him the full name of my daughter, Christian Kennedy Anson.

"Did you name her after John Kennedy?" he asked, an edge in his voice.

I knew what lay behind it; John Kennedy had sent the first combat advisers to Vietnam. "No," I said. "After his brother Robert, who wanted to end the war."

The officer patted my knee. "That is very good."

His second reaction came when I informed him I worked for *Time*. "Ah," he said, "a very important American publication. Not so important, perhaps, as *The New York Times*, but more so than *Newsweek*. Would you not say that is correct?" "Yes." I laughed, imagining what Arnaud [de Borchgrave]'s reaction would be if I ever had the opportunity to tell him.

After nearly two hours the officer, whom I had decided to call "Number One," to distinguish him from his colleague, whom I'd mentally christened the "Old Man," asked me: "Do you know who we are?"

"Of course, you're North Vietnamese. The Ninth Division, I imagine. In Phnom Penh we were told you were operating in this area."

THE WASHINGTON MONTHLY Journalism Award

for July is presented to:

Lars Larson
KPTV News
Portland, Oregon

This series of news reports focuses on the mess the U.S. Army is leaving behind for northeast Oregon as it closes its Umatilla weapons depot. Besides the acres of unexploded and possibly live ordnance, there are the highly toxic explosive, pesticide, and acid residues that have seeped into the sand and are making their way to the Columbia River, source of most of the region's farming and drinking water. The big reason the Army will probably never correct most of this damage? In defense budgets, being ecologically responsible isn't nearly as important as buying new weapons.

Myron Levin
The Nation

Heart disease and lung cancer aren't the only dangers of nicotine. There's also the annual toll of 1,500 people killed and 7,000 seriously injured in cigarette fires. And the carnage is unnecessary because tobacco companies already know how to make a much less combustible cigarette. But Levin reports that the Tobacco Institute is currently lobbying against legislation that would mandate such an improvement. The tobacco industry sees the measure as the onset of the sort of substantive safety regulations to which almost all other hazardous substances are subject but to which cigarettes have remained immune. Levin describes the industry's latest tactic: working with and funding hundreds of fire departments nationwide to get them to support less intrusive fire safety legislation.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation. Please send nominations to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

The award for stories published or aired in August will be announced in the November issue. Nominations for stories published or aired in September will close October 15. The winners will be announced in the December issue.

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Number One whispered to the Old Man, who did not seem happy about what he had heard, then turned back to me. "The position of my government is that it has no troops in Kampuchea. Why, then, did you say we were North Vietnamese?"

"Because it's the truth."

Number One regarded me a moment, then whispered again to the Old Man, who smiled this time. "It is good that you told it," he said. He got up to go.

"What will happen to me?" I asked.

"What do you wish to happen?" he replied.

"I would like to stay with you for a time and tour the liberated zone, perhaps interview the leading personalities of the Front," I said at last. "Then I would like to return to my family. They must be very worried, and I miss them very much."

Number One's expression was noncommittal. "The Front will decide," he said, "after we have found proof for what you have told us."

"In Saigon?" I asked.

"Do not concern yourself," he answered. "We have our ways."

Number One went outside with the Old Man. They talked briefly on the stoop, then disappeared down the stairs.

There was no more sign of them the rest of that day, and when they failed to turn up the next morning, I concluded that they had gone off to see if my story checked out.

The soldiers who had been left to guard me seemed relaxed. They weren't threatening me in any way, and though they were still keeping me loosely bound, they were letting me have the run of the house—provided I didn't approach their weapons, the doorway, or the windows. This was soft duty for them; in a way, I suspected, they almost welcomed my presence. Perhaps a friendship could be struck.

I approached the squad leader, a man in his late twenties with smooth pale skin and what, for a Vietnamese, were unusually large eyes.

"Bob," I said, pointing to my chest. "Me Bob."

The next day at breakfast I started in on language instructions. "Rice," I said, pointing at the food we were eating. "In America, we call this rice."

"*Lice*," one of my guards mimicked.

It was hard to keep from laughing. "No," I said. "Rice. *RRR*-ice."

"Rice," he said with difficulty. He beamed when I said, "*Oui*."

"Now tell me the Vietnamese word," I said, pointing at the rice again. "*Vietnamee*."

"*Cum*," another guard answered. "Rice, *cum*."

There was a long way to go before we could talk to each other except in the roughest sort of pidgin, but at least we had started to communicate. It made me feel more at ease with them. It also, I hoped, diminished the possibility that any of them would want to shoot me.

In the time I had to myself now I thought a lot about the way my colleagues and I covered the Indochina story; for all the energy we expended, none of us had a glimmer of what was going on in little villages like this one where, far more than on the battlefield, the war was actually being decided. What I tried not to think of, those stifling hours each afternoon in my bunk, was how much longer I'd have this opportunity for thinking.

Around 6 p.m. would come dinner, after which Radio Hanoi would deliver the day's maddeningly incomprehensible news. Then, after what I presumed was a propaganda pep talk and what seemed to be a textbook self-criticism session, the radio would blare out an hour or two of doleful Vietnamese music. Finally everyone would drift off to sleep, oblivious, except for me, of the far-off rumble of the nightly B-52 strike, which with clocklike regularity came just before 3:30 a.m.

The Vietnamese seemed to enjoy the monotonous

Another soldier moved forward and shouted at me. I closed my eyes. I felt the heel of his foot against my chest, then the coldness of his AK being pressed against my forehead. I began saying the Hail Mary.

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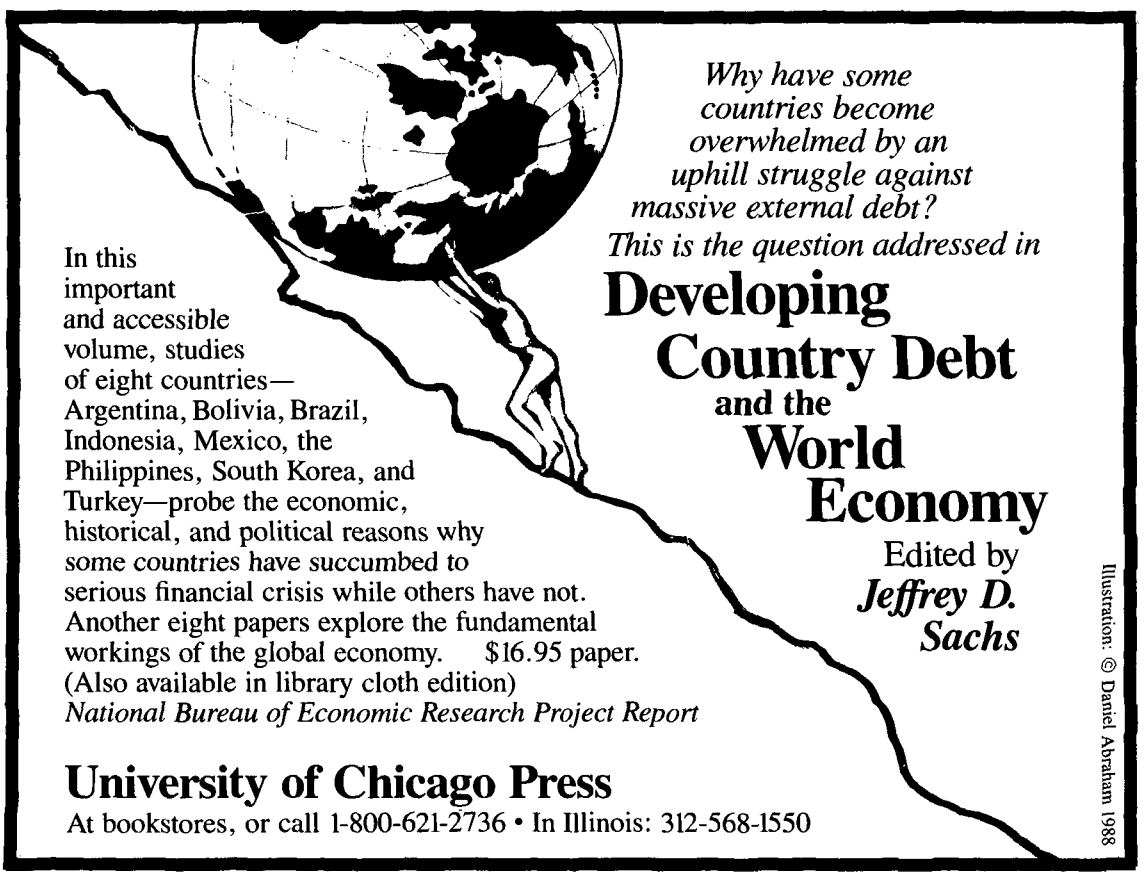
regimen, and in some ways so did I. It was fascinating to observe them at close range, and even more fascinating to see that, at least in the way they went about their daily ordinaries, there was so little to separate them from American GIs. The only immediate difference I could note was that the Vietnamese took better care of their weapons, which they disassembled, oiled, and cleaned twice a day, despite the fact that they never left the house to use them.

Obviously there were more profound differences I wasn't witnessing, none more inexplicable than what it was that kept them going. GIs, at least, could count on air support and medevac and regular letters from home—none of which were available for my guards, Hoa, Thua, Huong, Tieu, and Ti. Nor, unlike the grunts, who could tell you down to the exact hour the time left on their 12-month tour, was there any prospect for them of going home. They would fight and continue fighting until the war was won, or more likely, given the horrendous casualties the North Vietnamese were suffering (only 50 percent of them even survived the journey down the Trail), until they were dead.

I'd seen enough to know that they were neither automatons nor supermen, that they had bitches and shortcomings—particularly Ti and Huong, who always seemed to be screwing up something—just like Americans. From the jokes they cracked during the nightly indoctrination sessions, it was also apparent that they regarded some of the party rhetoric with the same seriousness GIs did lectures on motherhood and the flag. Yet something made them persist. I tried one day to extract an answer from Hoa, who appeared to have adopted me as his special charge. In reply he'd pulled out a crinkled photograph of his wife and infant daughter. He looked at it lovingly, then held up four fingers—one for each of the years since he'd seen them last. Sensing my incredulity, he then placed his hand over his heart and said forcefully, "Vietnam! Vietnam!" as if that explained it all.

With Hoa's permission, I spent the rest of the morning exploring my little domain. In one of the chests, I found a large store of bandages and pill bottles with French language labels, potentially valuable items. It was in the other chest, beneath some bolts of homespun fabric, that I uncovered the real treasure: a large blank ledger book. There was some Khmer writing on the cover, a year-old date, and in Roman letters



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the words "Kompong Phleung." I recalled seeing the same name on a Cambodian military map, somewhere to the northwest of the capital, though exactly where and how far from Phnom Penh I couldn't remember. At least now, though, I had a general idea of where I was. While I wasn't thinking of trying to escape (that, I had decided, was something I'd consider only as a last option, and only after I was in better physical condition and knew more of the language), I wasn't sure what the Vietnamese would think of my discovery. Waiting until the soldiers went into the other room to prepare the midday meal, I ripped up the nameplate and swallowed it.

A blood debt

After lunch I showed Hoa the ledger and gestured at the ballpoint pen that was poking up from his shirt pocket. He didn't seem to understand at first, but after I pointed to myself, said "*bao-chi*," and made a note-taking motion, he handed it over. I retreated to my bed and smoothed my hand over the first page, debating what to write. My first impulse was composing a letter to my wife, telling her how I was and asking after the children. My second, writing a story about what I'd experienced thus far, was only slightly more practical. Whatever I wrote, the Vietnamese were bound to read it, which could be a problem. But if I chose my words with care, I might be able to turn their inspection to my advantage. That's what I would do: keep a diary, a journal that would be not only a record of events but, if I was lucky, a ticket home.

On the ledger cover I wrote the words "Journal Hoa Binh," then, on the first page, the date: April 11, 1970.

I continued for the next several hours, mixing stilted encomiums to good will with details of everything I'd seen since getting picked up. By evening my tiny scrawl had filled up a dozen pages and become a source of wonderment for the soldiers, who sat around me oohing and aahing with every paragraph. Ti seemed especially captivated, and when my hand was too cramped to write further, I gave him the pen. he used it to make a drawing of a B-52. Then the others took their turn: Tieu did a precise rendering of an F-105; Huong, a sloppy though still identifiable version of an F-4; Thua, an amazingly realistic drawing of an A-6, complete with fragmentation bombs under the wings; and finally Hoa, who paused a long while before beginning a beautifully shaped dove.

The Old Man came back the next morning. Bent over writing, I didn't notice him when he entered the house or hear him as he padded across the floorboards to my bed. There was just the touch of a hand on my shoulder and a voice saying, "The soldiers permitted you this?"

I looked up startled. "It was something I found in the house."

He picked up the journal. "I didn't know you spoke English," I said, trying to seem unperturbed. "Did the other officer come with you?"

The Old Man didn't answer. Instead he began examining each word. After an hour he reached the last page, where, below the pictures the soldiers had drawn, I had composed a few lines of verse. "My fat/they say/laughing, poking/ is like Saigon."

"A poem?" he asked.

"An attempt at one."

The Old Man pursed his lips as if trying to decide what to make of everything.

I reached out for his arm. "Ho Chi Minh was a poet, was he not?"

"Yes," the Old Man said, smiling. "Ho Chi Minh was a poet."

"I can keep my journal, then?"

The Old Man nodded and handed it back.

The rains came early that night and with unusual strength, beating the roof and making it difficult to sleep. I lay awake for hours thinking of everything that had happened since the afternoon in Skoun. Tomorrow would be the 12th day of my captivity, a blink of an eye as the Old Man and the Vietnamese marked time. I looked at them curled peacefully in their hammocks. How many more days? How much longer would it be?

Hours later I felt my back being shaken. "No, Hoa," I mumbled, "let me sleep."

"Anson, get up!" The voice was Number One's.

"Oh, ah, hello," I said, sitting up. "I didn't know you'd gotten back. The rain last night, you must have gotten drenched, huh?"

Number One wasn't interested in banter. He had a stern look on his face. "The Front has made its decision," he announced. "But there is something you did not tell us." He paused, as if waiting for me to supply whatever I had omitted. But I could think of nothing.

"Takeo," he said sharply. "Why did you not inform us of what you did at Takeo?"

He was right. I hadn't said anything of finding the massacre, only that Takeo had been one of the Cambodian towns I had visited. Since none of the victims were Northerners or Communists, I hadn't thought that the Vietnamese would be interested. To judge from Number One's demeanor, however, holding back had been a mistake, possibly a serious one.

"I guess it just didn't occur to me," I said nervously. Number One's features softened and he shook his head as if amazed by my stupidity. "We have a tradition in Vietnam. Someone who saves the life of one of our children is owed a blood debt. The Front gives you its thanks. You are to be released." ❑

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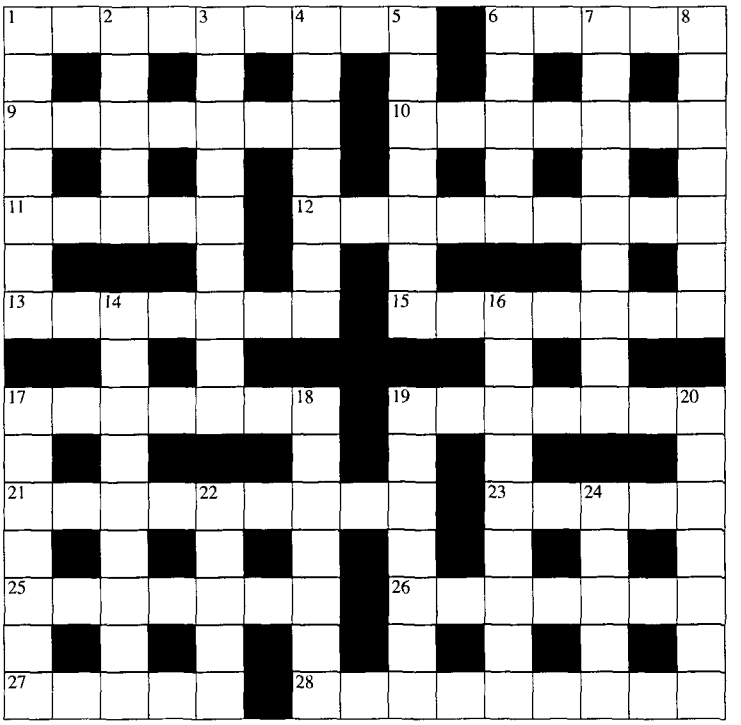
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



ACROSS

1. Hail a unit in formation in USSR. (9)
6. Weirdly state a preference. (5)
9. Strain is back in part of joint. (7)
10. Remain around before start of the tower. (7)
11. Children using up last of toilet paper. (5)
12. Dwarfs playing big role in U.S. history? (9)
13. Usually successful rival seems in disarray. (7)
15. Article disturbed Crimea for us. (7)
17. Leo's fib circulation shows weaknesses. (7)
19. Soviet area where air and egg are mixed with nothing. (7)
21. Going on stirring thin wine mixture before start of day. (2,3,4)
23. Bicentennial custom? (5)
25. Crooked line in Lincoln (in Kansas). (7)
26. Plain happening around driver's license, for example. (7)
27. A seed planted and let up. (5)
28. Made second gift to a noted Red organization. (9)

DOWN

1. Member of Soviet ethnic group aimed at Alvin. (7)
2. Looks after inclines. (5)
3. Imprecise vain rules are pervasive. (9)
4. One man's shaky request for anonymity. (2,5)
5. Mean air about certain Soviet region. (7)
6. Color little business in middle of battle. (5)
7. Producing sound street drink, Chinese style. (9)
8. Rowdy noise at Soviet trouble spot. (7)
14. Preserves principal satin fabric. (9)
16. Cute lion running around circle for political asset. (9)
17. Vessel great if at sea. (7)
18. St. Moritz attire is pretty weak, sir. (7)
19. Unexpected benefit from repairing dog's den. (7)
20. On his toes, dealer moves around last of meat. (7)
22. Change a thousand in troubled need. (5)
24. Haphazardly get an actor's representative. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:

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Whose No-Fault is It, Anyway?

You're paying through the nose for your car insurance. Who can you blame? The trial lawyers' lobby, your state legislature—and Ralph Nader.

by Peter Spiro and Daniel Mirvish

In America, there are three ways to get rich. You can work hard (but that's no fun). You can win the lottery (perfect—except for the long odds). Or you can get in a car wreck and sue. Due to the publicity that surrounds astronomical jury awards for such dubious injuries as "whiplash," it's this last path to wealth—the fender bender—that sometimes seems to offer the truest promise. Foreigners must be mystified by those American bumper stickers that say, "GO AHEAD, HIT ME—I COULD USE THE MONEY!" This, thinks the visitor from abroad, truly is the land of opportunity, where you can acquire great wealth just by getting your Ford bashed up.

But closer inspection shows this system contains more tarnish than shine. Having your Ford bashed up is only the first step. To actually collect money to pay for treating your broken leg, you have to prove that the crash was somebody else's fault—someone who's either adequately insured or wealthy. This creates all kinds of problems. For one, it means you have to hire a lawyer, who will then pocket 30 to 40 percent of the money the court awards you. It also means your insurance company, which is constantly being sued by other drivers, has to hire lots of lawyers, too, driving up the cost of your premiums. Someone has to pay for all those lawyers, after all, and that someone is you. So up go your premiums.

This system of suits, known as the tort liability system, also means you have to wait—those lawyers with all those suits create gridlock in the civil courts: more than 80,000 auto cases clog the California superior court system alone. Coast to coast, the nation's jurists are sifting through one car wreck after another, trying to decide whether Mr. Smith was at fault for not turning on his blinker in time or whether Mr. Jones was at fault for not seeing it blink. (Never mind that in most car wrecks, actual fault is usually shared—Mr. Smith made a quick turn, but Mr. Jones, who should have been more vigilant, was daydreaming about his girlfriend.) By the time the court gets through all those Smiths and Joneses and turns its attention to you, years are likely to have passed.

Clogged courts, of course, inherently benefit the wealthy and powerful, who have the resources to wait. You, the little guy with the broken leg, have just shelled out $5,000 in medical expenses, and you can't bide your time for three years before collecting, so you settle out of court for half of what you're entitled to in order to avoid complete destitution. The tort system routinely undercompensates people seriously injured in auto accidents, and overcompensates those with minor injuries. After all, those with big medical bills often need to settle, while those with minor injuries can afford to wait—particularly given the chance at a "pain and suffering" bonus that has nothing to do with emotional trauma or inconvenience, but is a standard three- or four-times multiple of out-of-pocket costs. A shot at such generosity also creates powerful incentives for outright fraud. No wonder

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insurers estimate that phony claims now account for 15 to 20 percent of all auto insurance payments.

Sound bad? It gets worse—the endless bickering over traffic cases that ties up the civil courts also keeps out matters that really do cry out for judicial attention. Say you're a small businessman who's been swindled by an unscrupulous contractor; or a parent whose brand-new, but poorly designed, toaster exploded and burned your child; or a black homebuyer denied credit by a racist bank. Chances are you'll have to wait years for justice because the courts are busy listening to Smith's and Jones's lawyers bending the truth about who caused that wreck. Of course this suits the shady contractor and the racist bank just fine; they can afford to wait. It's only you who can't.

"I don't think you could really design a much worse system if you tried," says insurance expert Andrew Tobias. Thanks to the inefficiencies of the liability system, only 44 cents of every premium dollar makes it into the pockets of accident victims. Compare that to 92 cents for Blue Cross health insurance.

Meanwhile, suits are on the rise. In Los Angeles County, tort filings have increased by more than 60 percent in the past two years. In the same county, jury awards for such notoriously unprovable injuries as whiplash and knee pain climbed 42 percent in a single year. As a result of this liability system, auto insurance is an increasingly unaffordable item: A Philadelphia couple with an 1988 Chevy and an 1984 Olds and two clean driving records now pays $2,400 annually for standard coverage. In a number of states, including Pennsylvania and California, the demand for auto insurance reform has emerged as a pivotal political issue; in New Jersey, the issue may decide who becomes the next governor.

Cheap, quick, and fair

What is so maddening about the crisis in auto insurance is that the solution is hardly a secret: no-fault insurance. That concept has existed almost as long as cars themselves (it was first conceived by Judge Robert S. Marx in 1925), and it's been a serious proposition since the publication of Robert Keeton and Jeffrey O' Connell's *Basic Protection for the Traffic Victim* in 1965. No-fault is cheaper, quicker, and fairer.

No-fault treats auto insurance like any other kind of insurance: If you get injured, you get paid. Period. It's cheaper because it eliminates the lawyers and the incentive for "pain and suffering" fraud. It's quicker because it eliminates the court delays. It's fairer because you get paid for what your injuries actually cost you—your out-of-pocket medical expenses, rehabilitation costs, and lost wages. True, you can't look forward to that pain and suffering jackpot—the kind that inspires bumper stickers—but then again Blue Cross doesn't compensate you for pain-and-suffering either. There's also a common-sense appeal to no fault: Since most accidents are just that—accidents—in which both drivers share some blame, what's the point in having a battery of lawyers concocting clever arguments about whose guilt is greatest?

The virtues of no-fault insurance have been borne out by experience. After Michigan switched to no-fault in 1973, AAA Insurance cut the amount it paid lawyers from 32 percent of its premium revenues down to only 4 percent; at the same time, it increased the amount paid to claimants from 48 percent to 73 percent. After New York instituted no-fault, its auto-injury court filings dropped 80 percent. In Michigan, the average insurance premium is 17 percent less than it would be without no-fault, according to a 1985 study by the Transportation Department. In New York it is 6 percent less; in 21 percent less. Furthermore, a recent study done by former White House Conusumer Affairs Adviser Virginia Knauer estimates that no-fault would save consumers $3.7 billion a year. As the California Insurance Commissioner put it, consumers are "not going to get lower auto insurance rates" without reforms like no-fault.

With the case for no-fault insurance being plain for anyone to see, an obvious question arises: Why has no-fault insurance—real no-fault insurance, that is—been instituted in only three states? And why does no-fault now seem such a discredited concept?

There are two guilty parties. The first is the trial lawyers. They're the ones who get rich dragging car wrecks through the courts, and, as it happens, they also have inordinate influence in the state legislatures, where insurance laws get written. (A 1945 act of Congress forbids the federal government from regulating the insurance industry.) The trial lawyers have consistently used that influence to block true auto insurance reform.

While this may come as no surprise—few of us have any illusions about the effects of lawyer-lobbyists on the public good—the second part of the answer is a surprise indeed: Ralph Nader. That's right, Mr. Consumer Advocate himself has consistently teamed up with the trial lawyers to block one of the most important consumer reforms in the country. While the trial lawyers are driven by plain old greed, Nader at least is driven by principle—his inordinate belief in the virtues of the lawsuit. But the effect of both on the average consumer is the same: He gets screwed.

Thanks to trial lawyers and Nader, there is a great deal of confusion surrounding no-fault insurance. While, in fact, it is an ideal reform that's seldom been

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tried, most people think it's been tried quite often and found to be a failure. That's because 21 states have concocted watered down no-fault systems—fake no-fault—that in some cases is worse than the tort system it replaces.

Witness this process at work: First the trial lawyers emasculate the no-fault proposals, ensuring their failure. Then, conveniently, they turn around, and point to those failures as evidence that no-fault doesn't work. They call it "stingy" for refusing to cover pain and suffering; they say only a tort-based system can punish bad driving. What they don't say is that they've got billions of dollars in contingency fees at stake. This is quite a sophisticated, and effective, con job; and with insurance reform bills pending in a number of state legislatures, the public's only hope is that enough voters see through it.

> While many consumer lobbies support no-fault, without Nader they have much less clout.

The watered-down no-fault laws the trial lawyers gave us break down into two categories. First, in nine so-called "add-on" states, insurers must offer (and, in five, consumers must purchase) a certain amount of no-fault coverage *in addition to* standard liability policies. In these states, individuals still have an unrestricted right to sue and be sued to recover for accident-related injuries; the only difference is that they can also recover additional amounts directly from their own insurer for out-of-pocket costs. Add-on legislation may result in more accident victims getting compensated—since payment on the additional coverage is not fault-based—but it will also mean higher premiums and no reduction in court caseloads.

In fact, add-on laws may result in *more* auto-injury-related court filings. Under the traditional tort system, victims are often left with no funds to cover accruing medical and other expenses while they await their turn on the docket. That's why claimants often settle instead of waiting for a court date several years away (and risking the uncertainty of a jury verdict). In add-on states, by contrast, no-fault coverage guarantees victims if not a war-chest, at least a cushion with which to press on with a lawsuit. This leads to more claims, greater dollar payouts per claim, and, therefore, higher premiums.

The second type of merely nominal no-fault system now in place—so-called "no-lawsuit" no-fault—has in some cases worked out even more poorly: Victims must meet a dollar threshold of out-of-pocket expenses before they can take their claims to court. But these thresholds are often so low that they keep virtually no cases out of court. For example, in Connecticut injured parties need only demonstrate $400 in medical expenses (that's a couple of trips to the doctor, with a few tests thrown in) to jump the no-lawsuit hurdle. And in other states with higher thresholds, victims have a powerful incentive to run up medical bills in order to make the cut. By contrast, true no-fault states, like Michigan, allow lawsuits only when someone's been killed, dismembered, or severely disfigured.

Money talks, no-fault walks

To understand why 26 states haven't had any no-fault legislation at all, and why 21 others have settled for No Fault Lite, which is often just as bad, it's important to remember a crucial fact about the politics of state legislatures: They're heavily influenced by trial lawyers. This happens in two ways. Countless key legislators are lawyers themselves—and therefore have an interest in preserving the tort system that earns them contingency fees. And countless others are the beneficiaries of trial lawyer largess.

Consider the case of Pennsylvania, where the trial lawyers first helped ensure that the state's no-fault law was watered down, then got it ditched in 1984, and have subsequently blocked attempts to reinstate it. In getting rid of no-fault in 1984, the trial lawyers teamed up with the insurance lobby, who agreed to support the lawyers' opposition to the no-fault law in exchange for getting the lawyers' backing on an entirely unrelated plan to create a state-run catastrophic insurance fund. "There is no question that '84 was a product of a joint effort by trial lawyers and the insurance industry," says Otis Littleton, a Pennsylvania House aide. "As a result, we have a law that benefitted everyone but the consumer."

When Governor Robert Casey tried to revive no-fault this past summer, the lawyers' lobby was again the chief impediment. The plan won bipartisan support in the state House but screeched to a halt upon arrival in the Senate—just as the lawyers, who have close Senate ties, expected. The bill's chief Senate

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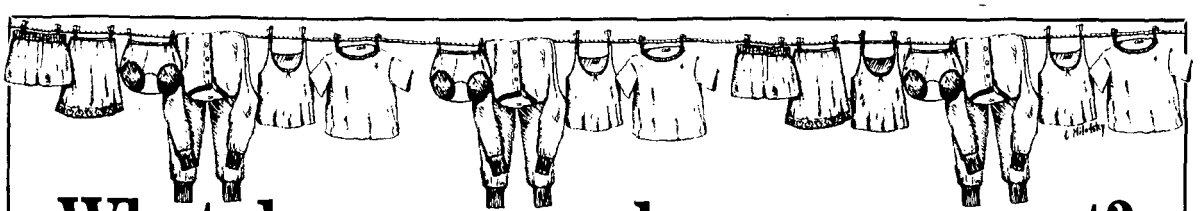
opponent, Ed Holl, who chairs the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee, had several reasons to set his considerable influence to work against it. Holl has been a favorite beneficiary of the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association; the lawyers have contributed $10,000 to Holl in the last year and a half alone, making him their second largest beneficiary in the legislature. In hindsight, it seems a prudent investment. Holl introduced his own insurance reform bill—one that retained the tort system that has been so generous to the state's lawyers—and the bill cleared the Senate. So now the state has a no-fault bill passed by the House, a tort bill passed by the Senate, and little chance of reconciling the two—meaning no-fault, for now, is dead. "The legislature is hopeless," says Herb Dennenberg, a former Pennsylvania insurance commissioner and an ardent backer of no-fault. "They roll over and play dead and let the trial lawyers take over."

Turn now to California, and you'll find it's deja vu all over again—someone suggested a no-fault system, and the trial lawyers blocked it. In this case, the someone was a legislator named Patrick Johnston, who chairs the Assembly's Finance and Insurance Committee. Johnston's no-fault bill had cleared the insurance committee and was heading for Ways and Means, where its prospects looked good, when Speaker Willie Brown, trial lawyer and trial lawyers' friend, began to intervene.

Maybe Brown just thinks a tort system is better. Maybe the fact that he himself works as a personal injury lawyer has no effect on his position. Or the fact that trial lawyers groups paid him $7,000 in honoraria last year. Or the fact that the California Trial Lawyers Association donated $85,000 to his last campaign—just for the primaries, that is. Or that the group's total primary contributions reached $873,000, making it the state's second-largest PAC. (They stopped giving money to Johnston, by the way, when he proposed his bill: no-fault, no money.) Or the fact that the vast majority of those funds went to the Democratic party that Brown leads. Maybe. Then again, whatever one may think of Willie Brown's leadership of the California Assembly, it's fair to suggest he hasn't achieved his position of influence by alienating his party's top financial backers.

The day before the Ways and Means Committee was scheduled to vote on the no-fault bill, Brown held a closed-door meeting for the committee's Democratic members, touting his own insurance reform bill—one that lacked the key no-fault provision. The next day the committee reported out Brown's bill and grafted on Johnston's proposal as an amendment, creating a completely incoherent proposal that called for



What does your underwear support?

Think about the last time you bought underwear . . . What did you know about the company that made it? Do they protect the environment? Do they invest the money *you spend with them* building nuclear weapons or supporting apartheid?

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no-fault insurance and opposed it at the same time. Not to worry. The plan was headed to the Senate Judiciary Committee, which must approve any insurance bill, and whose 11 members (eight are lawyers) had received $297,000 in campaign donations from the California Trial Lawyers Association during a recent 18-month period. The committee was glad to resolve the dispute, striking down the no-fault provision by a 9-2 vote.

Ralph's religion

The defeat of no-fault isn't the result of entrenched, moneyed interests alone; even entrenched, moneyed interests sometimes lose. Occasionally, heroes like Ralph Nader can bring enough publicity and morality to bear to make the good guys win. And Nader is so singularly influential that his determined backing would have the potential to make no-fault a nationwide reality. So it's all the more dismaying to find Nader using the force of his considerable reputation to *block* these efforts at reform. Anti-no-fault material recently mailed out by the American Trial Lawyers Association boasted, "From: Nader's Center for Study of Responsive Law—Not a Trial Lawyer Document." Nader's argument is that any restriction on the public's access to the courts is bad. That view has no doubt been shaped by Nader's fondness for product liability suits. Without them, consumers might still be stuck with all those injuries and medical bills from Corvairs and Pintos.

But unlike cases of corporate America turning out unsafe products, in most auto accidents there are no scheming Goliaths against whom only the resources of the courts will prevail—there are usually just individual drivers who have made unintentional mistakes. (Even the purer forms of no-fault allow lawsuits against the only real bad guys in this arena: drunks.) Nader has stubbornly refused to recognize this distinction. "Listen," he recently told a San Diego audience, during the California no-fault debate, "insurance spokesmen—and I've dealt with them for years all over the country—they don't want the tort system, period. They want to get rid of the civil jury." Harry Snyder, executive director of the Consumer's Union in California, says, "Ralph has a view bordering on the religious. It is a basic tenet of his being that no-fault shouldn't happen."

Without Nader's backing, the consumer lobby hasn't been able to bring much pressure to bear on the issue. The Consumer Federation of America endorsed the Johnston no-fault bill but made a self-conscious decision not to actively work for it. Some actually feel intimidated by Nader's disapproval. "It puts consumer groups in a difficult position to be on the other side of an issue from him," says Glen Nishimura, executive director of HALT, a Washington-based legal reform group. "The specter of, the promise of, the likelihood of Nader's opposition saps their enthusiasm on no-fault." And while many other consumer lobbies, such as the Consumer Union and the National Insurance Consumers Organization (a Nader spin-off group), do still support no-fault, without Nader they have much less clout.

Meanwhile, the nation's insurance companies have proved similarly ineffective as lobbyists. On the whole, the insurance industry tends to back no-fault, since it eliminates the outrageous jury awards, and, in reducing delays, tends to smooth relations with injured customers. But the insurance business is also a fragmented one; while the home office might back no-fault, independent brokers specializing in high-risk drivers might oppose it, since any measure that reduces premiums reduces their commissions. The lawyers have more at stake. Insurance companies, for the most part, will make their money either with no-fault or without it; it's the trial lawyer whose living is on the line. And at times, the insurance lobby has just had more pressing concerns, as in Pennsylvania in 1984, when the insurers traded away their no-fault bill in order to gain political backing on the catastrophic health care fund. Now, with insurance premiums at record highs, any proposal coming from the insurance companies is likely to meet with a large dose of public skepticism.

Still, with a good plan and wise promotion, the insurance companies and allies could win the no-fault battle. Unfortunately, the backers of no-fault haven't been putting forth either. Before the insurance debate wound up in the California legislature, for instance, it wound up on the ballot. Among the reforms voted on was Proposition 104, a no-fault plan backed by the insurers. But the insurers did little to court consumer support and tacked on a number of unrelated features; the final initiative sprawled to 24,000 words! The state's trial lawyers had an easy time painting it as an insurance industry con-job, and the proposal went down to defeat by more than a 2-1 margin.

By now, the trial lawyers and Nader have been so successful in misleading the public about no-fault insurance that no state has enacted a no-fault measure since 1983, even the watered-down kind. But that doesn't mean pure no-fault should be abandoned. On the contrary, without no-fault the auto insurance mess is unlikely to ever be straightened out. Experience has shown that without pure no-fault, you're stuck with phony reforms, fleeced customers, and courtrooms full of smiling lawyers. That's why in a sense, no-fault is almost inevitable. But it's a shame that it's taking so long. ❑

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MEMO OF THE MONTH

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

To Pat Rich

From Nancy Morgan

Date June 7, 1989

RE: Playboy magazine

Due to an increase in missing issues, PLAYBOY MAGAZINE will now be shelved in the drawer underneath the serial record. (The drawer will not be locked, but the magazines will be concealed from sight.) This only concerns the most recent issues, 1985+.

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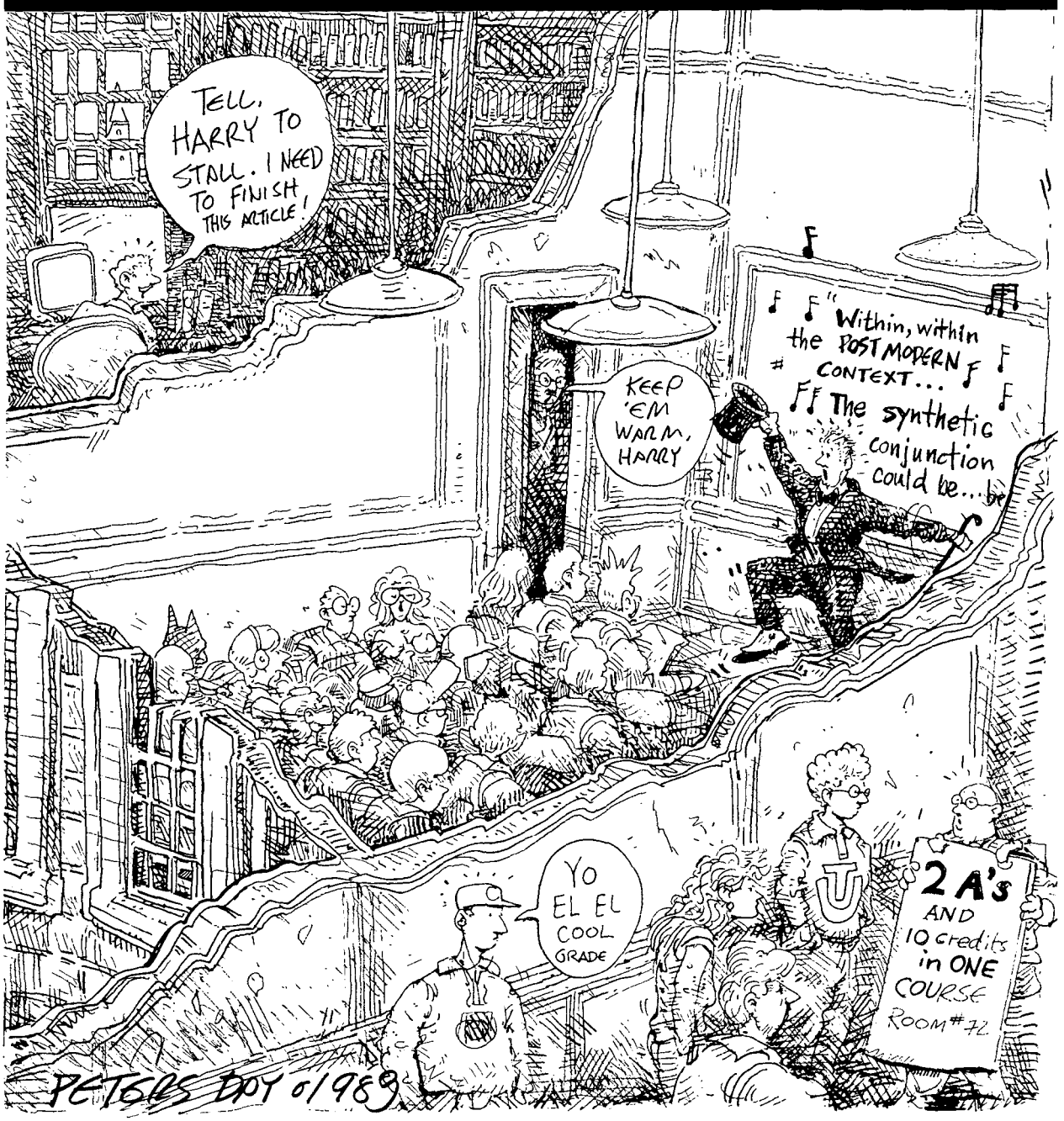
Why Higher Education is Neither

If college costs $18,000 a year, how come your kid's transcript is probably filled with courses like 'Poets Who Sing,' 'Persian Carpets,' and 'Australian History'?



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There must have been 20 of them that first morning. Hand-written, hastily scrawled notes on pink and yellow pages; most folded neatly, nearly all dated with the precise time—each seeking a place on the waiting list for a course in Contemporary Literature. Nothing could have been more heartening to the anxiety-ridden graduate student teaching it than such a sight, distracting her as it did from her feelings of woeful incompetence and lack of training as a teacher.

Some of the notes came adorned with smiling little happy faces; others were peppered with exclamation marks; yet others addressed her formally, deferentially. Their authors were evidently desperate for—were, in fact, living for—a chance to take the course, which incidentally happened to fulfill the second writing requirement at the University of Virginia's School of Arts and Sciences.

> Dear Ms. Mundy (the notes typically ran, though a few presumed a first-name basis right away):
>
> I would like to enroll in your Contemporary Literature course but was not admitted in registration. Please put me on your waiting list. I am thinking about majoring in English, and your course will make or break the decision for me. The reading list looks really interesting. I'll see you in class on Thursday. Thank you.
>
> Yours Truly,
> A. Undergrad
> 228-91-6855

The graduate student didn't know what to do. Nowhere is it written that if undergraduates didn't get admitted into a course by U.Va.'s computer registration, they should leave the instructor a note and show up in class on the first day; but somehow, mysteriously, some just knew to do it. Heartened to imagine that her course was considered so essential, the graduate student collected the notes and agonized over fair ways to rank them. Pull them from a hat? Number them as they came in?

In the end, half didn't show up at all. At U.Va., it turns out that the prudent student writes 10 desperate notes to 10 different instructors and simply enrolls in the first course that opens. Instead of satisfying the writing requirement with Contemporary Literature, she can knock it off with Physics 383: "Descriptive and Synoptic Meteorology." Or European History 542: "Popular Religion." Or Astronomy 313, "Observational Astronomy." Or—hard to believe as it may be—if those courses are closed the student can try "Seminar in Japanese Buddhism," "The German World After 1918," or "Australian History." In fact, any one of exactly 82 courses will satisfy the writing requirement.

The note-writing and other game-playing that begin the semester at U.Va. and most American universities raise a series of pointed questions to which higher education has no good answers—and which lead us, in fact, to suspect that what passes as higher education quite often is neither. The questions: If this overbooked course is deemed so important that it inspires desperate competition to get in, why is it being taught by a mere graduate student? If the knowledge being conveyed by the course is so fundamental, why are so many students getting shut out? And given the supposedly essential nature of the course, why are students permitted to take any number of scattered, often weak alternatives?

B.U. lets U.B.U.

The answers point to the bane of higher education: a con-job known as distribution requirements. Falsely advertised as a university's way of guaranteeing educational coherence, distribution requirements are in fact no more than a smoke-and-mirrors curricular trick. Listen to the way the U.Va. course book touts its rules: "The requirements for this degree are intended to introduce students to a broad spectrum of knowledge and to develop in them the skills and habits of learning." Such language is grand. Such language is also conveniently vague—just right for reassuring gullible parents that their sons and daughters are mastering the basics of history, literature, art, and science.

What most universities aren't saying is that they couldn't care less what kind of history, art, or science the student tackles. The laxity takes two forms. One is the old-fashioned "gut" course, the class of little substance that promises an easy grade. At Berkeley, the student can meet fully half the natural science requirement with "The Age of Dinosaurs," whose main required reading is a set of prepared class notes sold in the university book store. Students at UCLA last year could meet half of their science requirements with "Geology 150: The History of Los Angeles," once voted one of the country's 10 easiest courses.

The second, and perhaps more pervasive, problem

by Jason DeParle and Liza Mundy

Jason DeParle is an editor of The Washington Monthly. *Liza Mundy is a reporter for States News Service. Additional research and reporting for the article provided by John Heilemann.*

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isn't the course's ease but its narrow scope. At Boston University, students can satisfy fully half of their humanities requirement with a course on "The New England Poets." It's easy to imagine such a course being rigorous indeed. And worthy—Robert Frost, Robert Lowell, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau are all on the reading list. But by combining New England Poets with another equally narrow course (for instance, "Whitman and Dickinson") the B.U. student can satisfy the entire humanities distribution requirement without ever hearing a symphony, reading a philosopher, or looking at a painting; without, in fact, knowing anything about literature other than that produced by a handful of American poets. Solemn coursebook promises aside, distribution requirements ensure nothing "broad" at all but instead promote the opposite, a here-and-there dabbling as course openings and convenience permit. In the end, even the brightest students have transcripts with more holes in them than an Ollie North alibi.

> The student can satisfy an entire humanities requirement without ever hearing a symphony, reading a philosopher, or looking at a painting.

The cure is the core—the core curriculum, that is—a few carefully designed courses that *all students must take* and that ground them in the world's great books, events, and ideas. The goal is to cut across the narrow boundaries of academic departments, and lay the foundation for a student's later, more specialized study. While definitions of what to include will of course vary—Milton may be in on one list, out on another—still the result will almost certainly be impressive, and infinitely better than the anything-goes philosophy of the distribution requirement.

At Columbia, for instance, every incoming freshman must take the school's vaunted year-long course in Contemporary Civilization. Its reading list includes Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Adam Smith, J.S. Mill, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, among others. Every student must take Literature Humanities, which includes Homer, Aeschylus, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, the Bible, Dante, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, Jane Austen, and Dostoevsky. Similar courses cover the great traditions in art, music, and the natural sciences. Everyone may have their pet omission: Where's Aquinas? The Brontes? But what a striking difference there is between Columbia's promise of broad spectrums and those at U.Va. and B.U. It's not that Columbia students can't go on later to study New England poets; it's that they can't graduate by studying *only* New England poets.

Yet only a handful of American universities are built upon a true core, while hundreds, ranging from Harvard and Yale down to the average state university, let their students settle for the hit-and-missness of distribution requirements. If, as a parent paying through the nose to educate your children, this makes you angry—it should. The reasons for it lie in the bureaucratic incentives of the modern university, where power over the curriculum is lodged in academic departments more concerned with their own interests than with those of their students. To the department chair, distribution requirements mean guaranteed students, and guaranteed students mean money and power. If, as a parent who's bought this academic ruse, this makes you livid—well, it should. It is, finally, a form of contempt toward your kids.

In fact, whether you have kids or not, there's a good chance that you, gentle reader, wasted much of your own college time in similar fashion, mastering the Beats but knowing nothing of Aeschylus or Augustine, Byron or Burke. And if that leaves you feeling pissed at your alma mater—it should.

Harvard's core lite

Fortunately, the absurdities of college curricula have drawn an increasing amount of fire in recent years. Unfortunately, it's almost exclusively card-carrying conservatives who are aiming the gun. William Bennett made curriculum reform a favorite bully pulpit subject during his tenure as education secretary. Allan Bloom's attack, *The Closing of the American Mind*, earned him a nationwide best seller. So did that of E.D. Hirsch. What's unfortunate is that while the conservative reformers have diagnosed the ailment correctly—*curricula diluta*—they've tended to offer a suspiciously narrow cure: a canon composed almost exclusively of Western, and male, influences. Liberals have responded by dismissing the idea of a core altogether—ceding leadership to the Right—rather than working to institute their own core, one that preserves greatness as the standard but doesn't stop at William Bennett's borders.

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The struggle over curriculum reform is not new in America but has been going on for more than 100 years; and it's one in which the good guys usually lose. The once-classical core began to fragment with the rise of electives in the 1870s, and with the rise of the Ph.D., which elevated specialization and began parceling universities into autonomous departments. By 1900, Harvard, for instance, had abolished every course requirement on campus, with the one exception of English composition. At Harvard and elsewhere, students were on their own.

The rebellion against this fragmentation began most notably perhaps at Columbia, where, by the 1930s, a Great Books course begun by John Erskine had expanded into the kind of core curriculum that still exists there today. Columbia's good fortune lay in having not only such a comprehensive curriculum but some of the country's best teachers to teach it, people like Lionel Trilling, Mark Van Doren, and Jacques Barzun. The University of Chicago installed a similar regimen, under the leadership of Robert Maynard Hutchins as president; St. John's in Annapolis took the idea to an extreme, devoting its students' entire four years to the study of Great Books.

By the mid-forties, Harvard began taking note of these reforms, and of its own moth-eaten curriculum. The school's subsequent experience, on up to today, is useful to consider, since Harvard so often sets the tone for other universities. In 1945, James Bryant Conant, the university's president, issued a plan much like Columbia's—a mandatory regimen of basics before moving on to a major and specialization. But the school's faculty rebelled, stalling efforts at reform, then as now.

Put yourself in a professor's shoes and the reasons aren't hard to imagine: By defining some things as "essential," the core would tacitly label others as inessential—and what faculty member wants his life's work thus labeled? What's more, if the core included, say, Shakespeare, it would strip the English department of its exclusive Shakespeare rights—a key way of attracting students into the department. Including Adam Smith would pose the same threat to Econ; Plato to Philosophy, Mozart to Music—they're *ours*, you can hear the department chairs growl. And what, perhaps, was more threatening still, someone would have to *teach* these ambitious interdisciplinary courses: a laborious endeavor that would take faculty away from their narrow and secure specialities (and, hence, away from the assurance of publishing, the key to career advancement). Cutting Conant off, the faculty beat back the idea of a core and substituted a set of General Education choices instead—in effect, a set of distribution requirements.

The initial damage was limited. Students could

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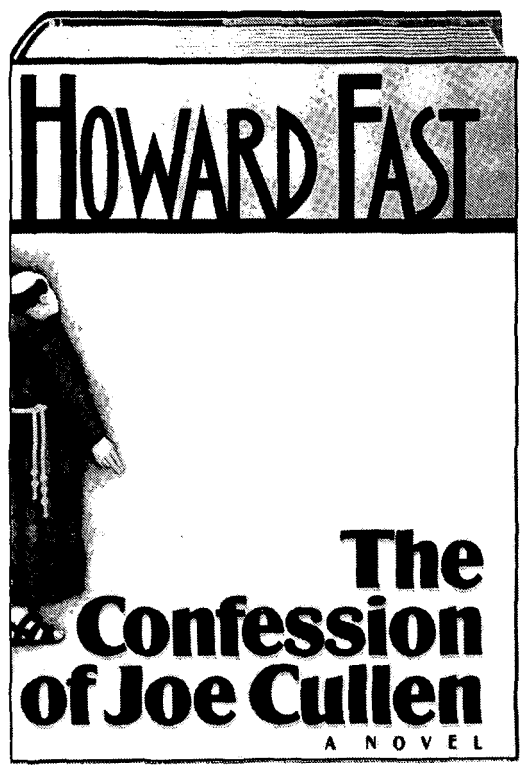

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choose between "The Social Inheritance of Western Civilization" (emphasizing events) or "Western Thought and Institutions" (emphasizing ideas), but they still wouldn't graduate without knowing the basic foundations of their civilization. While it's true that these offerings were more dominated by Western tradition than they should have been, still they demanded that the student master a broad intellectual framework.

By the 1960s, however, such demands fell into disrepute, and the enthusiasm for "relevance" arose. New academic fashions sprang up everywhere—Afro-American studies, women's studies, folklore and mythology—and each faction demanded that its courses, too, should satisfy the General Education requirement. Harvard's General Education Committee decided, in its words, to "let a thousand flowers bloom," and the pollen soon filled the air. The number of General Education courses exploded from 37 in 1964 to 120 in 1978, and included such basics in any undergraduate's repertoire as "The Making of Australia," "The Role of Women in Irish Society," and "The Classical Music of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh." Similar changes took place across the country; Brown went even farther—abolishing *all* requirements outside the major.

Recognizing the incoherence of its program, Harvard in the mid-seventies again sought to institute a core curriculum. What it got—and what remains—is a program that William Bennett calls Core Lite, a fake core that, in fact, is just another set of distribution requirements. The parents who peruse their daughter's 1989 *Introduction to the Core Curriculum* will see it grandly touted as "an attempt to say what it means to be broadly educated today. . .an introduction to the requirements for a vigorous life of the mind." Editors at *The Harvard Crimson* know better. "The Core sure won't give you a coherent picture about Western history, scientific advances, or philosophical thought. . . ." they recently warned students, "you could graduate from Harvard without ever having read Shakespeare, understood Newton, or thought about Plato."

The reasons for the reform's unraveling were familiar: the faculty fought tooth-and-nail against a plan that would require ambitious interdisciplinary teaching; rival departments engaged in pork-barrel politics to ensure that their own favorite offerings were included in the mix. Thus by 1988 the "Core" had bloated out to include 145 courses in 10 different distribution areas.

Pop Goes the Curriculum

Forget Aristotle. Forget Moby Dick. I want my MTV.

The course is called Video Music 454, and its only textbook is *The Rolling Stone Book of Rock Video.* Term paper topics have included a comparative textual analysis of two Twisted Sister videos, and the earlier and later works of Prince. To bone up for exams, the eager young Cal State-Los Angeles students put in all-night cram sessions—watching MTV. During the day, you can find them sitting in a darkened classroom, viewing Weird Al Yankovic's epic, "Dare to Be Stupid"—advice, it might seem, that they are taking seriously.

They're not unique, either. Unencumbered by required readings of, say, Dante and Dickens, students across the country are flocking to courses featuring Spielberg, Spiderman, and Springsteen. From the pulp fiction of Louis L'amour and Sidney Sheldon to the elements of ritualism in dining at MacDonald's, the popular culture long snubbed by the Academy is now increasingly being embraced. As in the 1960s, academia is being shaped by the fascinations of the public. Then, the feminist and civil rights movements begat Women's and Afro-American Studies; now, in the obsessively media-centric age of "Entertainment Tonight," pop culture is the discipline du jour.

Pop culture courses litter the curricular landscape like fallout from some postmodern apocalypse. At Northwestern, there's the high-sounding "Rhetoric of Cultural Genres"; the genres, which rotate yearly, have included "used car salesmen" and "celebrityhood." At Boston University, you can take the euphemistic "History, Media and Social Change in 20th Century America" (which students call "Sitcoms and Society"). At the UC Santa Barbara, there's always "Sociology of News"; at University of Maryland, there's a course on the anthropological significance of soap operas; at Brown, the unabashed "Rock 'n' Roll is Here to Stay."

True, even a course like "Rock 'n' Roll is Here to Stay" *could* be a rigorous and worthy study. An investigation of pop music could tell you a great deal about race, class, and gender in post-World War II America. After all, even *The New York Times* considers rock 'n'

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Gut glut

The problems with this system are familiar. One, there's the gut. Here's how the *Crimson* editors describe "Thought and Change in the Contemporary Middle East," which satisfies the core's foreign cultures requirement: "[Professor Nur] Yalman greeted the masses with a morsel of his winning wit: 'I know you're all here just because there's no final exam.' Most professors recoil at the thought of teaching a course rumored to be an amazing gut. The magic in this case is that Nur wallows in it."

Two, there's the potentially tough, but narrow, offerings that, taken together, comprise not a core but a sliver. A Harvard student can satisfy the three Literature and Arts requirements with the following: "Beast Literature," "Monuments of Japan," and "The Celtic Heroic Age." Ah—so that's what it "means to be broadly educated today"!

Realizing that someone might catch on, Harvard built in an answer: the core seeks to convey not specific material but only "major *approaches to knowledge*. . .what *kind* of knowledge and what *forms* of inquiry exist. . .*how* they are used, what their *value* is"—everything, that is, but the knowledge itself. The high-brow elaboration of this decision goes something like this: alas, in today's rapidly changing society, any body of knowledge is both unfathomably large and subject to becoming quickly outdated; therefore, what's important is to teach people how to think. Sounds profound—but why can't a student's "major approaches to knowledge" be honed on Dante as easily as on "Beast Literature"? The blunt explanation: the system of faculty privilege triumphed again.

Such hokum is now the university norm. Boston University promises its distribution requirements will "achieve for the student a functional and creative competence in . . . each major division of the curriculum." But we've seen how a student can be said to have gained "functional and creative competence" in the humanities by cobbling together "New England Poets" and "Whitman and Dickinson" (that is, if the student passes by "Stalking the Wild Mind," a study of the occult whose readings include tea leaves and tarot cards and that also satisfies the distribution requirement). The social sciences requirement, meanwhile, can be satisfied with the combination of "Comparative Family Systems" and "Folksongs and Social History." The midterm for the latter consists of making a tape of folksongs—"not exactly a tough exercise," says one student currently enrolled. The course, designed for 25, ballooned this year to 100.

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roll worthy of its sober analysis.

But more often, pop culture courses are inhabited primarily by students looking for a light reading list and an easy A, not by budding cultural historians. Next time you're in St. Louis, you might drop by Washington University's "Backgrounds in Modern Literature: Poets Who Sing," in which students compare the poetry of Bob Dylan and Bob Marley. The memorable mid-term took a form that one student described as "an in-class, gang oral. The prof would ask a question, we'd yell out the answer, and she'd toss a piece of candy to whoever got it right first."

To answer the obvious: yes, this course counted toward a liberal arts degree. In fact, at many schools pop culture classes count toward distribution requirements. If you attend the University of Rhode Island, you can fulfill half of your lit requirement by reading the likes of John LeCarré in a class called "Spy Novels"—that's right, fully *half* your exposure to the world's great literature. If you go to Virginia Tech, your core requirement in humanities could be polished off with a two-course sequence in "Theories of Pop Culture" and "Media Effects" (the latter concerns itself with, among other subjects, the sociological implications of "time-shifting technologies"—off campus, we call them VCRs). And at the University of Texas, "Early Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant" can be replaced with "History of Rock and Roll." Okay, you're 18 again—which would *you* take?

Pop culture courses are, unsurprisingly, often stimulating and fun—qualities routinely undervalued by conservative higher ed reformers. But that hardly justifies the prospect of students emerging from the ivy having read lots of comic books and no Cervantes. Immature undergraduates who think themselves shrewd for evading, say, Milton, by studying science fiction will regret it later. I do.

Not to worry, says Professor Ray Browne, founder and chairman of the nation's only degree-granting Department of Popular Culture, at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. "What useful purpose can be served by studying Aristotle?" he says. "Aristotle won't walk with you when you're looking for a job on Wall Street. . . . TV, pop music, best selling novels—these will be with you when you walk down the street, or when you come out of the Library of Congress and encounter a crack addict."

Now there's a theory of education.

Browne compares *Moby Dick* with *Jaws* and describes the question "Why heavy metal?"—posed in his department's course on rock music—as "epistemologically intriguing." Interesting, but one question remains: what institution is qualified to accredit that major? *Rolling Stone*?

—*John Heilemann*

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One excuse frequently made for such a flim-flam system is that while some courses, like "Folksongs," are open to all comers, others, like "New England Poets," are "upper-level" courses that therefore assume prerequisites—other, more central, courses. But the prerequisites themselves are typically unspecified and routinely waived; on most campuses, no one checks. In New England Poets, for example, "The professor *assumes* the students have taken the background courses," explained the B.U. department secretary. Prerequisites are as flimsy as the distribution requirements themselves.

The University of Texas pledges its requirements will ensure "a meaningful pattern and coherent sequence." But its history requirement can be fulfilled with "Great American Trials" and "Artists in American Society"—a combination that happens to omit such historical incidentals as the fall of Rome, the Middle Ages, the American Revolution, the Civil War, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and the dismantling of the British Empire. The Social Sciences requirement can be met with two of the following three: "Sports and Society"; "Archaeo- and Ethno- Astronomy of the Americas"; and "Gypsy Language and Culture." According to a U.T. dean, fully half of the college's Fine Arts requirement can be met with a course on Persian carpets. That's right. Persian carpets.

"A cop out"

The point, of course, isn't that any of these courses are inherently worthless. Even a course in Persian carpets has the potential to teach a student a great deal not only about carpets but about Middle Eastern history, politics, economics, and religion. In fact, with a great teacher and smart classmates, it's possible to argue that a student could leave the class in Persian carpets with more lasting insights into human spirit and endeavor than those provided by any other course in his entire college career. It's possible, but not likely, since, driven by the pressure to publish, his teacher may be more preoccupied with polishing his latest article than provoking his students, and most of his classmates care considerably less about the Middle East than they do about knocking off that Fine Arts requirement. The bigger point is that it's all fine and good to study Persian carpets; *some* freedom to dabble can be the most wonderful part of a college education. *Some*. . . but only when the student's interest is real.

To gauge the amount of dabbling now going on, consider the following report from the National Endowment for the Humanities: *more* than 80 percent of college students graduate without a course in American history; almost 80 percent graduate without a course in Western civilization—and 37 percent graduate *without any history course at all*. About 77 percent graduate without studying a foreign language. And 45 percent leave school without ever taking a course in American or English literature.

Pressed on figures like these, educational administrators will adopt a more apologetic voice than the one employed in the coursebooks. "This cafeteria curriculum of loose distribution requirements doesn't provide a balanced educational diet," says Joseph Horn, the associate dean of the college of liberal arts at the University of Texas. "Students take what they want and not for any of the reasons they should."

"No one thinks the distribution requirement system is a system with great integrity," says Russ Edgerton, president of the American Association of Higher Education. "It's a cop-out in the sense that an institution doesn't have any conviction about what courses are more important than others."

Iago who?

With books like those by Hirsch and Bloom on sale at every mall in America, the message about the woefulness of higher ed may be getting through to the general public. But it's not getting through to most members of the liberal elite. This failure not only strengthens the hands of the entrenched faculty interests who will guard departmental privileges to the death but also leaves the idea of a core curriculum in the hands of those conservatives, who, as liberals fear, will fill it with a Western bias.

Taking Jacques Barzun's idea of the goal of a core—"to take the student and show him a mirror of the world"—today's liberals should be working to ensure that the mirror reflects *all* the world's great traditions. Certainly the mirror of contemporary civilization, these days, would include Islam; in music it would include the African-American tradition of jazz; in art, it would include Chinese painting. Unfortunately, curricular reformers of the left sometimes insist on a pollster approach, that seeks to apportion great books along quotas of gender and ethnicity. While West African sculpture's place in the history of art should be secure, that of, say, pre-18th century women writers in the history of literature isn't. How many, besides Mrs. Aphra Behn, were there? Few, despite recent efforts to find them.

Mastering a great tradition does something else that's important, something that Harvard's "approaches to knowledge" tack doesn't do—it grounds the student in the common vocabulary of his society. The student who passes up Shakespeare for Beast Literature may have a difficult time when he reads a politi-

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cal column describing Richard Darman as George Bush's Iago. In a case like that, a single word can convey a world of understanding.

When even the college deans admit that their curricula stink, an obvious question arises: why doesn't the situation change? The answer begins with the realization that ultimate power over the curriculum rests, finally, with professors—especially tenured ones, who can't be removed. If the average college president wants to add a course to his school's curriculum, about the only way he can do it is by going out and raising the money himself. If you're surprised that this powerlessness isn't better known, don't be; what figurehead administrator will take pains to acknowledge his emasculation?

Even a president as boisterous as B.U.'s John Silber—an insistent backer of a core—has had little effect on his school's curriculum. "The faculty insisted on being the one to build any changes from the ground up," explained Alan Marscher, chairman of B.U.'s academic policy committee. Years of hot-blooded hassling ensued. The result? This year, the school is offering a voluntary core for about 150 of its 3,547 entering freshmen. The rest will face the same old system of distribution requirements, in which, Marscher explains, despite an attempted tightening, "courses of marginal educational value continue to arise and attract many, many students."

The second thing to realize is that universities are run with the interests of the staff foremost in mind, not the interests of the students. In their focus on their own needs above and beyond those they purportedly serve, universities are like a great many other modern institutions, including, for instance, the medical establishment and most agencies of government. Or, as core champion Robert Maynard Hutchins once put it, "Every great change in American education has been secured over the dead bodies of countless professors."

The faculty's interest in preserving the perverse status quo stems from two maladies: the system of campus budget allocation, and the primacy of the Ph.D., with its emphasis on specialized research. Universities are fragmented into departments and each faces a dual dilemma: one, its professors need to conduct the highly specialized research that allows them to publish and gain and preserve stature in their field; but, two, the department also needs to attract students to its courses, for without students its funding will wither. That is, while most "teachers" feel acute pressure to polish their latest monograph, they also need to entertain the people who cough up the tuition.

Distribution requirements offer the perfect solution. By demanding that students take *some* courses in history (or English, or art, and so on), the requirements ensure the departments a steady flow of bodies. But by refusing to delineate what, precisely, the students must study, the requirements don't interfere with the professors' research needs—the professors get the bodies, but the bodies don't get in the way. Departments are free to indulge in courses that either stem from, or lead to, the professor's next publication. Thus are born such fundamentals as U.T.'s study of gypsies, courses in which the professor, in effect, offers the student a trade: I'll give you one distribution requirement in exchange for your indulgence while I prepare my next conference paper. The outsider who questions this cozy arrangement will no doubt be denounced as a Philistine; and if the outsider is a parent, such lofty phrases as "academic freedom" may even accompany the indignation.

Of course, such standards as Intro to Western Civ can still be found in the course catalogs of most major universities. That's not to say that such survey courses will stand between that professor and his conference paper, however. The professor gets away with one or two lectures a week, while responsibility for such professionally unrewarding experiences as leading seminars and grading papers is usually left to graduate students.

The reign of academic specialization creates one more problem that the supporters of core curricula need to keep in mind: most members of today's faculty simply aren't prepared to teach the kind of sweeping courses required by a genuine core. For professors, especially the younger ones, are the products of the same inadequate educational system they perpetuate. A few years ago, U.T.'s Dean Horn was in charge of a committee that designed a proposed core. "It sounded great until we realized we didn't have nearly the resources to implement it," he says. "[Professors] have great specialties and little general knowledge. They would resist it because they'd have to prepare and gear up and alter what they normally do—they're just not prepared."

Swapping and trading

About the best thing that can be said about today's curriculum is that it doesn't guarantee that students will graduate uneducated; it just fixes the odds heavily in that direction. Arriving on campus, the average freshmen still has a fighting chance, but he will need two rare qualities. First, at age 18, the student must have the wisdom beyond his years to know that, in the decades to come, his life will be better served by a grounding in the essentials of economics than in U.T.'s "Magic, Witchcraft, and Sorcery," which fulfills the same social studies requirement. And since most 18-year-olds arrive on campus thinking more

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intensely about members of the opposite sex than about either economics or witchcraft, this quality is somewhat rare.

Second, it isn't enough to have decided, of one's own volition, to pursue basic economics. The wise student must then possess the bureaucratic skills needed to get in. On those rare occasions when a truly talented teacher tackles a broad and worthy subject, the competition for a spot is likely to be severe.

> By labeling some things as 'essential,' a core would tacitly label others inessential—and what faculty member wants his life's work thus labeled?

Here, beyond the promises of coursebooks, is the voice of educational reality; in this case, it belongs to sophmore Ruffin Hall, the student government's director of academic affairs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill:

"Let's say I want a certain course and my friend John wants to drop it," he says. "I go with him to the registration table and get in line. Then when he drops his card—each card represents one space in the class—I'm right behind there to pick it up and I'm in. There's a lot of this kind of swapping and trading and wheeling and dealing that goes on. You do what you've got to do."

Gene Davis, another Carolina student, explains that drop-add week is more stressful than exams, since students who don't get into enough classes can lose their full-time status, and, with it, their financial aid. "In a case like that," he says, "you're forced to just sign up for any course that's open, whether you're interested in it or not."

Now if Ruffin Hall's parents should happen to learn of this system, they are likely to respond in one of two ways. They might (rightfully) be proud of their son's fine promise as a man able to negotiate the world; Ruffin Hall sounds as though he'll never get stuck in a fine French restaurant at a table by the kitchen door. They might also (rightfully) wonder why the hell the faculty advisors who are supposed to serve as curricular counselors don't do something about this madness.

Should Ruffin abandon his Machiavellian gifts and decide, say, to take a Gandhian approach—camp outside the president's office until he shames the department chairmen into creating more spaces—the faculty adviser will clear his throat and sagely advise against such imprudent action. For the next thing you know, someone might be camping outside *his* office, demanding that *he* teach more courses too.

Nor will the faculty advisor tend to offer much counsel on bureaucratic manipulation. Facts of life like those mastered by Ruffin get picked up on the street if they get picked up at all. Instead, the average faculty adviser will simply explain that, "If Western Civ is closed this semester, you can still meet your distribution requirement with 19th century Puerto Rican history." That's if you can get to the faculty advisor at all. Most likely, the adviser will post hours as convenient as, say, 2:00 to 2:15 on alternate Tuesdays, and will be busily rubber-stamping the cards of the 18 people in line as you try to explain your educational aspirations.

There are always a few students both wise and wily beyond their years, who can master the bureaucratic tricks. But the rest, the great mass of perfectly bright but insufficiently wary students will simply surrender to the system, absurdly imagining that the school has their best interests in mind. And many otherwise bright and promising people leave school with lifelong handicaps as a result.

Carolyn Kelley, a 1987 graduate of the University of Iowa, explains that, in her roommate's case, the difficulties of negotiating the system not only dictated the course selection but the entire major. Repeatedly shut out from her chosen department, "she kept taking classes in the broadcasting program. After four years, she graduated with a degree in communications and a concentration in broadcasting—she was stuck with a degree in an area she had no interest in." In some cases, having failed to negotiate the distribution maze in four years, the less conniving students will have to stay a fifth—which means, not incidentally, extra tuition for the school.

How concerned about the fate of the student are the nation's great grey eminences, the men and women of letters who command huge campus respect? We asked one prominent professor what he thought of a system that allowed a student to bounce around and graduate with one history course in, say, Great American Trials, and another in 19th-century Puerto Rico. His answer was stripped of all pretense and reflects the contempt the current system embodies: "Any student who's ass enough to make those his only two history courses deserves his fate." ❑

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What America Hasn't Learned from Its Greatest Peacekeeping Disaster

Two hundred and forty-one young Marines died needlessly in Lebanon. They were set up by clumsy diplomacy and bad intelligence. They were done in by Bud McFarlane.

by Scott Shuger

The picture was taken from the southern suburbs of the city. It's a steady picture, well-centered, and correctly exposed. Very likely the camera was already set up on a tripod, already pointed in the right direction. The incredible noise and the shock wave was all it took to alert the photographer that it was almost time to click the shutter. The man looking through the viewfinder was probably an Amal militiaman who, like the Marines below him, had been waiting, waiting, waiting. Only difference was, he knew what he was waiting for.

Taken just seconds after detonation, the picture reveals the dread mushroom shape already towering above a wounded city—a deadly copy of its instantly recognizable Hiroshima cousin. And although the blast was non-nuclear, it was nearly as large as the ones that ended World War II. Below several hundred feet of grey-white toadstool puff is a much more formless smoke-storm of nasty black. Below that is what's left of American Middle East policy for 1983—241 dead Marines and a lot of questions. The Marines should be left to rest in peace. But the questions should be raised.

The picture of the explosion should be much more famous than it is. This was, after all, the outcome of the first major foray into foreign diplomacy by George Shultz and Robert "Bud" McFarlane. One night not too long ago, you could flip on "MacNeil/Lehrer" and watch McFarlane explain how we should deal with Lebanon. You'd never guess that he once actually had that job. And screwed it up royally. We aren't likely to do better next time until we understand why the U.S. failed so miserably in Lebanon the last time.

There were two official government investigations of the bombing of the Marines at the Beirut airport—the report issued by the House armed services investigations subcommittee, and the report issued on behalf of the Department of Defense by an ad hoc collection of retired senior military officers called the Long Commission. Both investigations were limited to questions pertinent to operations *within* the military. Indeed, the most concrete action to come out of these investigations was the issuing of "nonpunitive letters of caution" to the two senior Marine officers at the airport, effectively ending their careers. In short, the real extent of the government's look at itself in the Beirut debacle was that a colonel and a lieutenant colonel got fired.

Christians 6, Moslems 5

Once you start probing the whole Beirut affair, it becomes clear why official Washington was satisfied with such an artificially narrow look at it. Because the people truly responsible were at much higher levels of government. Way above colonel.

A bit of history is central to the story. Lebanon was carved out of the old Turkish Empire after World War I and administered by the French under a mandate from the League of Nations. The newly partitioned population was dominated by Christians, but there

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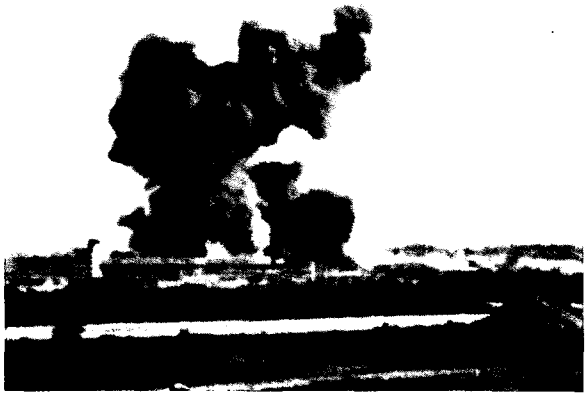

were a lot of Moslems too. Under the French, a system of government evolved that guaranteed the supremacy of Christians in every facet of Lebanese life. In politics, there was a precise formula that reserved the office of president for a Christian, the premiership for a Sunni Moslem, and the speakership of the Parliament for a Shiite Moslem, and that apportioned the Parliament in a way that guaranteed Christians a 6 to 5 ratio over Moslems. Similar mechanisms were in force in the civil service and the army.

This system stayed in place long after the demographics had changed dramatically. The power struggle between Lebanon's Moslems and Christians only intensified after the French left in 1946, and would punctuate the next 40-plus years. In 1958, fighting between the two factions prompted the Christian president of Lebanon to request American assistance. The U.S. responded by sending in 14,000 Marines, whose presence was stabilizing enough for elections to be held. Having sustained only three fatalities—two of them by drowning during recreational swims—the Marines were back home again in four months. In the 1970s, Lebanese strife went from bad to a horrible form of worse. As a result of the PLO's expulsion from Jordan, Palestinians were flooding into the country, but Lebanon's Christians were still trying to dominate the growing Moslem majority. In 1975, the conflict erupted into civil war.

Lebanon's sectarian battles presented problems and opportunities for Syria, to the east and north, and for Israel, to the south. Each country—a sworn enemy of the other—was wary of the burgeoning Palestinian presence there, and each wanted to bring Lebanon into its own sphere of influence. Syrian army units originally entered the fighting at the invitation of the Christians, but by the early 1980s, they were slugging it out in enormous artillery duels with Christian forces, duels that continue to this day. In June 1982, Israel reacted to what it viewed as the intolerably expanded Lebanese operations of the PLO and Syria with a massive invasion of Lebanon. Although Israel supposedly had promised the U.S. that its only aim in doing so was to provide a security zone for its northern border, in the operation Israel destroyed a quarter of the Syrian air force and some 300 Syrian tanks. Within days Israeli troops were in the suburbs of Beirut.

And that's where the U.S. came in again in 1982. With the PLO surrounded and its back to the sea, Yassir Arafat wanted his fighters out of Lebanon. But he also wanted some sort of third-party military presence to ensure that his forces weren't routed in the bargain. And the Israelis, fearful of a less than thorough evacuation, insisted on U.S. participation in the scheme. The answer arrived at was a multinational force (MNF), comprised of U.S. Marines and French and Italian forces, which successfully supervised the peaceful departure of 15,000 PLO fighters from Lebanon. Having done their job, the MNF forces left Beirut in early September 1982.

Four days later, Bashir Gemayel, the head of the Christian Phalange militia, who, under Israeli sponsorship, was about to be installed as the new president of Lebanon, was blown up by a bomb at his headquarters. Two days after that, revenge-seeking Phalangist troops entered the West Beirut Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila and murdered hundreds of innocent civilians. After these two bloody developments, Amin Gemayel—who replaced his slain brother as the head of the Phalange militia and of the fledgling Lebanese government—requested that the MNF return to Beirut for an indefinite period to provide stability. After the Sabra and Shatila episode, it wasn't clear that Gemayel could even control his own Phalange faction; he certainly couldn't control the Moslem factions and Syria and Israel.

Since a key part of the deal to evacuate the PLO had been the U.S.'s written promise that the Palestinian civilians left behind would not be harmed by the Lebanese Christian militias or Israeli troops, the request to reenter Lebanon was received with a considerable amount of American guilt. A *Washington Post* editorial caught the mood: Sending in the Marines again demonstrated that "the United States

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was still prepared to do its duty as a leader of the community of free nations. . . . A lesser response could have been the signal of an American retreat from responsibility."

But unlike when the Marines evacuated the PLO, this time they had no specific military objective or timetable. Their official orders merely stated that their mission was to provide "a presence in Beirut, that would in turn help establish the stability necessary for the Lebanese government to regain control of their [sic] capital." The fuzzy language was vintage State Department—emphasizing that we were only there at the request of the host government. But its vagueness set the stage for later tragedy, since it provided cover for military adventurers like McFarlane, who would later distort the mission from bipartisan peacekeeping into active military support for the Gemayel government.

Jeep thrills

The next mistake was made on September 29, 1982, when 1,200 Marines went back in. The problem was their location: they took up positions in and around the Beirut airport, which was chosen for its distance from Beirut's mean streets and its closeness to the sea, which facilitated supply and, if need be, quick evacuation. Also, it was hoped that the Marines could keep the airport open—a superficial but commonly cited index of normality in turbulent locations. Despite these pluses, the airport was a disastrous choice for regular military operations. It was low, open ground—completely vulnerable to hostile artillery fire from the nearby Shouf mountains.

But perhaps regular military operations didn't seem too relevant at the outset of the Marines' deployment. War-weary Lebanese of many factions were glad to have them there, viewing them as friends and protectors. Indeed, when daily jeep and foot patrols into the neighboring predominantly Shiite suburbs started in November, they were a big hit. "When we first arrived in Beirut, it was just great," one of the U.S. troops later told Thomas Friedman of *The New York Times*. "People were always stopping you and giving you things. We felt really appreciated."

Even so, Lebanon in 1982-83 was not a simple place for any country trying to make peace, not to mention for *America* trying to make peace. Yes, the Christian militias and the Lebanese government they dominated were mostly pro-Western and pro-American, but the Moslem side of the equation was more complex. There were Lebanese Druze, Lebanese Shiites, and Syrians and Palestinians and Iranians. Some of these Arabs had no initial hatred for Americans. Although the Druze had from time to time cast their lot with the PLO, they were politically conservative and hence not truly comfortable with the PLO's doctrinaire leftist anti-Americanism. The Druze repeatedly claimed that as long as the Marines and the Israelis left them alone, their only quarrel was with the Christians. And Lebanese Shiite Moslems—the most downtrodden of all Lebanon's Moslem sects—had initially welcomed the Marines because they were only too happy to be rid of their arch-enemies, the Sunni Palestinians. There were even Shiite units in the Lebanese army receiving U.S. supplies and training.

But there were other Moslem factions implacably hostile no matter what the U.S. did. And, measured in the Middle East, "implacably hostile" takes on new meaning. To cite just one example: earlier that same year, Hafez al-Assad, the president of Syria, had, in the throes of a sectarian feud, unleashed an artillery assault on a Syrian town called Hama that killed 20,000 *of his own countrymen*. As the Marines took up their new post, they were being watched by enemies accustomed to playing by the region's "Hama rules" (Thomas Friedman's phrase)—including about 1,000 Iranian Revolutionary Guards, sent by the Ayatollah Khomeini to recruit Lebanese Shiites as anti-American terrorists.

So, crudely put, where America was concerned, Lebanon had "good" Arabs (sympathetic to the U.S.), "bad" Arabs (unwaveringly hostile), and plenty of Arabs on the fence. Now, it could be persuasively argued that by late 1982, there were already so many "bad" Arabs in Lebanon that the Marine peacekeeping mission should never have been attempted in the first place. But if the Marines were to go in, it's clear that any U.S. peacekeeping mission would have one absolutely inviolable requirement—zealously guarding our image of nonpartisanship among all the neutral Arabs. Actually siding with one faction, or even just *appearing* to, would turn neutral Arabs into hostile ones. For the Marine mission to Lebanon to have any chance for success, we had to scrupulously avoid knocking Arabs off the fence.

Naif Shultz

So how, then, was it that we spent the next year doing just that—knocking the Arabs off the fence, in a way that virtually guaranteed the Marines' demise? It's a two-part question really: a)How did the U.S. turn neutral Arabs into hateful ones? and b)Why didn't the U.S. know about the dangers posed to its Lebanon mission by this large and growing anti-Americanism? Not understanding a) was like lighting a fuse. Not understanding b) was like standing around and watching it burn.

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The failure to understand began in earnest with George Shultz. During the first months of renewed U.S. military presence in Lebanon, the newly-installed secretary of state made most of the decisions on Lebanon, working closely with the U.S. special envoy, Philip Habib. Shultz was new to the region, and, indeed, new to diplomacy, but Habib was a former foreign service officer who knew the Middle East well—it was Habib who engineered the PLO evacuation. Shultz thought that if the Israelis got a good enough deal, including tangible political, military, and even economic benefits, they could be convinced to leave Lebanon. And if the Israelis left, Shultz reasoned, then Syria could be persuaded to follow suit.

On the surface, this was the same formula that the U.S. had successfully pursued with the Camp David accords between Israel and Egypt, but to Shultz it may have had other appeals as well. By involving himself with a high-visibility negotiation, Shultz could gain the stature that had proven so elusive for some of his recent predecessors at State—recall how William Rogers was eclipsed by Henry Kissinger. And, indeed, no sooner had Shultz arrived in the Middle East than *Time* was reporting that "the secretary appears to be conducting a one-man negotiation," and that the Israelis thought he had "asked all the right questions." Also, in offering the Israelis so much of what they wanted, Shultz could silence other critics, too—those who thought his previous career at

The Worst City Government

Last month, a blue-ribbon citizen commission found that the District of Columbia had 1,200 more school administrators than comparable districts elsewhere. You have to wonder what all those administrators do all day. Where the Washington public schools could really use that kind of extra manpower is in the maintenance division, which is supposed to keep up the District's 191 school buildings, most of which are more than 40 years old. Despite a $35 million annual budget, maintenance officials admitted this summer that outstanding repairs on leaky roofs, crumbling walls, buckling floors, and broken plumbing have created a $150 million backlog.

Between 1986 and 1989, 21,000 work orders were submitted to the District's school maintenance office to make repairs in schools without drinking water, and with 100-degree classrooms, missing doors, and falling ceilings. Less than a fifth of those repairs were made.

What with cost overruns from crime waves, prison troubles, and the like, one might blame the broken windows and clogged toilets on city budget blues. But even the cheapest of fixes aren't being made. According to the commission, many schools regularly go without such basics as light bulbs, clocks, and bathroom soap—which, for the third of District kids who live in poverty, surely makes school seem a lot like home.

—*Katherine Boo*

Shortly after his reelection in 1987, Carl Officer, mayor of East St. Louis, Illinois, announced that he would retain five police bodyguards for the remainder of his new term. A few months later two of them were suspended for their misconduct in a crowded Peoria tavern. When the bodyguards escorted the mayor to the bar's bathroom, they locked themselves in it with him. Meanwhile, a crowd of patrons whose need to relieve themselves was as great as Hizzoner's started pounding on the door. The mayor's bodyguards responded by coming out with a service revolver and an Uzi drawn.

Almost exactly a year later, another of Officer's bodyguards punched out trash contractor Sidney Collins after Collins had walked into a city council meeting demanding to be paid for his services. The next day, security guards physically booted a TV crew from city hall for trying to interview Collins, and Mayor Officer declared the building off-limits to all journalists lacking his or other city officials' express permission. James Ingram, the mayor's spokesman, explained why the restrictions applied only to journalists: "We don't have to watch what the general public does at 5, 6, and 10 p.m."

In May of this year, Officer was officially "uninvited" from a paid trip to Zaire because of comments he made at a press conference. "He didn't intend it to be racist. He intended it to be dumb—and it was dumb," exclaimed Glenwood Roane of the Zaire-American Research Institute, a cosponsor of the trip. "I'm still baffled," said Johnny Scott, president of the East St. Louis chapter of the NAACP. "How can you say something like that? You're black," Scott wondered.

What did Officer do to spark such ire? It wasn't just that he was planning to take his own Spam, Cheese Whiz, and Nestle Crunch bars. He also wanted to take his own blood supply. "If there are any accidents," Officer announced, "I don't want any transfusions from monkey blood."

—*Daniel Mirvish*

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Bechtel, which does a lot of business in Arab countries, had left him with an anti-Israeli bias.

Habib's role in the Shultz strategy is not totally clear. Some diplomats believe that Habib expressed skepticism about it to Shultz in private. But he never took that view in any wider forum. Habib's loyalty as a good organization man seems to have overruled any misgivings he may have had about Shultz's plan.

Whatever Shultz's motivation, by the spring of 1983 it was clear his approach was off the mark. Shultz's tack corroded America's appearance of even-handedness when he should have been jealously guarding it. If the U.S. was to serve as a regional peacemaker, that meant coming across to all sides as scrupulously fair. By coming back into Lebanon for strictly humanitarian purposes, the U.S. got off to a good start on this count, but by pressing for an agreement that gave voice to many of Israel's strongest demands about Lebanon, Shultz's diplomacy was undercutting our stance as peacemaker.

But once Shultz fixed on his course of action, he could not be deterred. Nicholas Veliotes, the assistant secretary of state in charge of the whole Middle East, told Shultz the plan wouldn't work; so did *every one* of Shultz's ambassadors to a major Arab state, at a closed-door meeting before the final round of Lebanon negotiations. At that meeting, for example, Robert Dillon, the ambassador to Lebanon, argued that the strategy was doomed because Gemayel's support inside Lebanon was much more narrow than the Shultz/Habib strategy presupposed. Gemayel certainly couldn't speak for all of Lebanon in addressing Israel because he didn't control all of Lebanon. He didn't even control all of West Beirut.

This was the background for the accord between Lebanon and Israel—personally presided over by Shultz—which became known as the May 17 agreement. According to the agreement, in return for withdrawing its troops, Israel was granted de facto recognition by Lebanon, while still retaining considerable control over the military situation inside southern Lebanon. The accord put strict limits on the number of Lebanese forces allowed in southern Lebanon while yielding control of the area to the Israeli-sponsored South Lebanon Army.

These features played very badly in much of the Arab world—the dominant Arab perception was that this U.S.-forged agreement forced Lebanon to recognize Israel, while ceding the Israelis real power. Moreover, there was an incredible "side agreement" provision that meant that for all these palpable drawbacks, nothing had truly been gained after all: not one word of the agreement took effect unless Syria removed its troops—something Syria's Assad immediately refused to do. So the Israelis didn't leave then either. In fact, in linking Israeli withdrawal to Syrian cooperation, the accord gave Syria new power to keep the Israelis bogged down and doomed any hope of a quick Marine withdrawal.

George Shultz called the agreement a "milestone." In retrospect, it was a millstone. Without really changing anything on the ground, the U.S. had managed to lose its standing as a neutral broker. According to Charles William Maynes, editor of *Foreign Policy*, the accord "showed what a naif Shultz was. He just didn't understand Lebanon. He thought it was a country like any other, but it's not a country—it's a collection of tribes."

The fuse was lit.

Silent spooks

Meanwhile, as U.S. diplomacy was setting the Marines up, U.S. intelligence was letting them down. The need for good intelligence in Lebanon should have been obvious from the start, since no matter what the U.S. did, there would be large numbers of "bad" Arabs out to get us—and willing to play by Hama rules. Once the U.S. began violating its image of impartiality, driving more Arabs into the "bad" camp, the need for good intelligence only grew stronger. Exhibit A of that need came on April 18, 1983, when a bomb-laden kamikaze truck blew up the U.S. embassy in Beirut. Responsibility for the act was claimed by a previously unknown Shiite group, pledging allegiance to the Ayatollah Khomeini. Virtually the entire CIA contingent for Lebanon was killed inside the embassy when it blew up. The Lebanon CIA people were so uninformed that they weren't even able to protect themselves.

In subsequent months, intelligence blunders compounded. In June, a special Defense Department team returned from a trip to Beirut with word that the Marines were not being given adequate intelligence about terrorists. The Pentagon ignored the news. And as Jim McGee of *The Miami Herald* later reported, after the embassy bombing, the CIA sent two officers into Lebanon who discovered that a five-man, Iranian-financed ring did the deed and that the key member of the plot was a very high-level official of the Phalange—the group that dominated the Lebanese government. The CIA learned this months before the bombing of the Marine barracks. But incredibly, *the CIA never told the Marines.*

Kept in the dark, the Marines continued to rely on Lebanese government officials and soldiers. And that may have been the habit that cost them their lives. Because the initial arrangements for the Marine mission in Beirut stressed a low-profile presence, and an expanded role for the Lebanese army, the latter was

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

HE ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT FROM NOW ON BATTING AVERAGES WILL BE AVAILABLE ONLY TO STOCKHOLDERS

When *The Long Beach Press Telegram* polled Major League general managers on the abilities of their players, Roland Hemond of the Baltimore Orioles refused to answer, stating that the "information could be used against us in an arbitration case."

IT'S 75 PERCENT OFF IF THE GUY GOT KILLED IN AN EASTERN CRASH

Eastern Airlines recently offered a 50 percent discount for corpses shipped aboard its planes. The airline also said that funeral directors could earn bonus frequent flier mileage based on the volume of casket business they bring in.

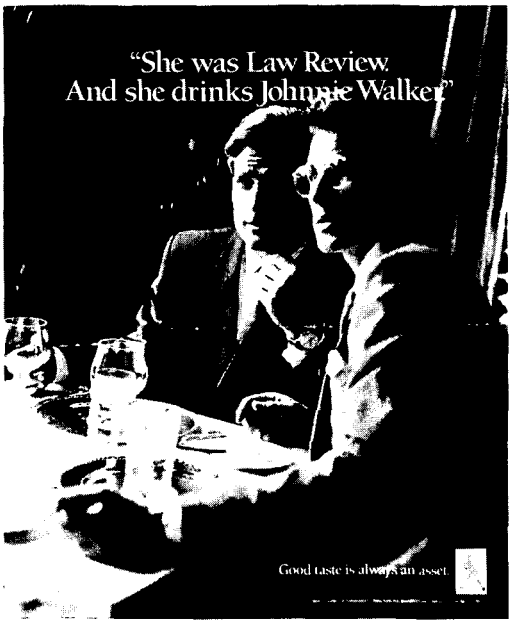
WAIT A MINUTE, WE COULD CALL IT "HAVE SOME KIDS WITH STEVE GARVEY"!

The cable network ESPN dropped plans for a kids show called "Play Ball with Steve Garvey" after former baseball star Garvey admitted fathering two children with women he wasn't married to.

SOMETHING TELLS US HE'LL DO FINE IN HOLLYWOOD

Upon being set free from death row in Texas because of evidence revealed by the movie *The Thin Blue Line*, Randall Dale Adams sued the filmmaker, Errol Morris, over the rights to his life story.

AND SOON SHE'LL BE LEAVING THE BAR AND TAKING THE FIFTH



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given primary responsibility for vehicle inspections along the airport's outer borders. No one knows for sure how the bomb-truck got into the airport, but the best guess is that it came through the Lebanese army checkpoints along the highway. But if the Marines had known that a high-level Phalange had helped bomb the embassy, they almost certainly would have restricted the ready Phalange access to their compound and would have tightened security along the outer perimeter as well.

> Gemayel certainly couldn't speak for all of Lebanon because he didn't control all of Lebanon. He didn't even control all of West Beirut.

Even before leaving Washington, the CIA agents who undertook the embassy bombing investigation were ordered not to cooperate with the teams the FBI sent to Lebanon to investigate. This was repeated to them upon their arrival by new Lebanon CIA station chief William Buckley—who was later kidnapped and murdered by the same terrorist crowd the agents were trying to stymie. When one of those agents returned to Washington briefly before leaving on his next assignment, it became inescapably clear that at CIA headquarters as well, the prevailing attitude towards the embassy bombing investigation was apathy. "When I came back, no one debriefed us," he remembers. "No one even asked us to file a written report. On my own initiative I went back to the office where we had been sending reels and reels of tape we made during our investigation. There was one Arab girl with a couple of tape recorders, months behind in transcribing the tapes we sent her."

The fuse was burning brightly now. And we were just watching it glow.

Cowboys in the saddle

Now it was the turn of Ronald Reagan's National Security Council to make things worse.

There was never any such thing as an "administration line" on Lebanon. While George Shultz wanted to send the Marines into Lebanon to bolster his diplomacy, the Pentagon desperately wanted to keep them out. Most military leaders had serious misgivings about a "presence" mission, with no clear goals. As Francis "Bing" West, the assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, later explained in a Kennedy School case study on Lebanon: "[The Marine mission] struck many in the Pentagon as having a high degree of danger, without explicit orders as to what the Marines would do. . . ." Moreover, one word was in the back of almost every senior military mind: Vietnam. Few military officials wanted an overseas deployment without firm and express congressional approval. As one senior officer put it, "The top echelons of the military had formed a 'Never Again Club.' "

But the Pentagon dovishness on Lebanon was finally outweighed by the hawkishness of the NSC, which, under Ronald Reagan, had taken on a crazy cowboy quality. Nowhere was the recklessness of the Reagan agenda better represented than at the NSC.

If Vietnam was at bottom the reason the Defense Department wanted to stay out of Lebanon, it was also the reason the NSC wanted to go in. Throughout the crisis, the NSC's more cavalier staff members spoke of the chance to overcome, once and for all, the "post-Vietnam syndrome," which they saw as paralyzing U.S. foreign policy. Their guiding thought was: "What was the point of the big Reagan defense build-up if our renewed military capacity couldn't be used in situations like Lebanon?" (Two days after the Marine bombing, the Reagan administration found a more docile setting to fight a war—Grenada.) Thus, the NSC hawks kept devising new proposals to *expand* our military role in Lebanon. At one point they came up with a plan calling for the deployment there of *63,000* U.S. troops.

Bud Lite

The NSC's compact size makes it a particuarly dangerous agency with hawks at the helm. With the passive William Clark holding the post of national security advisor, McFarlane, and his like-thinking aides Geoffrey Kemp and Howard Teicher, were able to dominate the small staff. And unlike State or Defense, the NSC was small enough to pack up and take most of its key people "operational" in the field—it could gain the kind of upper hand an organization gets when its top echelons are on the scene. According to the Kennedy School study, the Washington inner circle at State tended to dismiss the NSC zealots as "a bunch of bright kids hanging around and making comments." But they were hanging around the White House and were making those comments to the president.

The Washington turf battles over Lebanon cried out for resolution. Bud McFarlane thought he could

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supply it.

After the May 17 agreement, Syria's Assad would no longer talk to Habib, citing the agreement as a personal betrayal; so a new presidential envoy was needed. McFarlane, then deputy director of the NSC, was tapped for the job.

While Shultz had already made the Marines vulnerable by rendering our diplomacy partisan, McFarlane would finish the job by making our military partisan as well. McFarlane was so anxious for the U.S. to throw its military weight around in Lebanon that he usually avoided even *consulting* anyone who might counsel differently. Morris Draper, who had been Habib's assistant, recalls how close-minded McFarlane was during his arrival in July. "He didn't even want to be briefed [by the outgoing envoy team]," Draper said. "But Shultz made him. He had his own views and didn't want to hear others." Dillon, the former ambassador to Lebanon, says McFarlane and his aides refused to talk with Habib for fear of being "tainted."

McFarlane's refusal to confer with the area's experts was almost criminal, particularly given his lack of background; although he was a former Marine lieutenant colonel, he'd scarcely set foot in the Middle East before. By contrast, Habib had spent much of his career mastering its intracies. Even if McFarlane intended to change the region's policy, and even if he considered 90 percent of the professional diplomats' views to be fudge, he still could have learned a tremendous amount by putting questions to the smartest people. McFarlane's disdain for Habib was yet another embodiment of the Reagan ideological spirit—stick to your bias and let the facts be damned.

New gang in town

McFarlane quickly aligned himself with Amin Gemayel's narrow, and widely hated, Phalange faction. McFarlane had managed to get himself and his deputy brought into Lebanon above Dillon in the diplomatic chain. And in that superior position, McFarlane went alone to talk with Amin Gemayel—something Habib would never have done—and then at Gemayel's urging, ordered Dillon to break off all communications with the leader of the Druze militia. The original American plan for dealing with Lebanese factionalism leaned heavily on the idea of strengthening the Lebanese army and making it truly multi-sectarian. But not only was Gemayel failing to open up his army and government to Moslems; in attempting to assert government control over West Beirut, he was arresting them in wholesale numbers, and dynamiting their homes. The more McFarlane's fidelity to the Gemayel government increased, the more he turned previously neutral Arabs against us.

And it wasn't as if McFarlane had no leverage over Gemayel; he controlled huge amounts in military aid that Gemayel wanted desperately. Not to mention that he could probably get the Marines taken out of the country with a couple of phone calls.

McFarlane's war

Because of McFarlane's partisanship and because of the Iranian recruiting campaign among Lebanese Shiites—which that partisanship helped make more successful—by the late summer of 1983, Lebanon's anti-American population was growing fast. This trend accelerated in September, when domestic pressures on the Begin government peaked, forcing the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Shouf mountains southeast of the Beirut airport. With the Israelis out of the Shouf, Syrian-sponsored Druze militias, as well as the increasingly hostile Shiite groups, began to infiltrate the western and southern suburbs of Beirut and the high ground to the east overlooking the Marines. By this time, as a result of the growing U.S. support for the Gemayel government, the Druze were pretty soured on the Americans. Together, the Shiites and Druze constituted, as one of the Marine commanders said later, "a new gang in town."

And it wasn't long before the new gang was shooting at the Marines. They weren't shooting at the nearby Lebanese positions and hitting Marines with a few stray rounds by mistake. They were shooting at the Marines. Exposed on their low, open ground, the Marines were now subject to nearly constant artillery and mortar barrages.

At the end of August, the Marines at the airport suffered their first fatalities from Moslem fire. At first, the Marines and an offshore Navy cruiser responded by firing nonlethal illumination rounds over the guilty Druze position. But when, despite this warning, the incoming rounds kept slamming into the Marine bunkers at the rate of four a minute, the Marines used live artillery fire in response for the first time, silencing the Druze weapons.

Two days later, the Marine jeep patrols into the towns adjacent to the airport, which a few months before were still being enthusiastically greeted by the Lebanese, were called off.

Any hope the Marines ever had for playing peacekeeper was now lost. And, given their untenable geographic position, there was no way to win an artillery exchange. With their image of neutrality shattered, and with the shells falling, only one sensible option remained: McFarlane should have ordered the Marines out of the airport and back onto their ships.

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Instead, McFarlane plunged into the new fighting up to his eyeballs. Making nearly constant use of satellite communications with the White House, McFarlane soon won approval for a number of expanded military measures: Navy fighters from carriers off the coast began flying reconnaissance missions over the Shouf; more Navy ships started returning fire against Druze positions; the battleship *New Jersey* was alerted for deployment off the coast of Lebanon; and 2,000 more Marines were added to the Navy fleet just offshore. Each of these measures further imperiled the peacekeeping mission and put the Marines in further danger. With the military role expanding, so too was the likelihood of deaths among Moslem civilians. And the thirst for revenge that would cause would not be directed against the carriers and battleships—they were too far away. It would be directed against the Marines—who, tied to their low ground, remained in easy reach.

As disastrous as these new U.S. tactics were, they were at least self-defense. But McFarlane would not settle for that. He saved his most perverse move for last—he put the U.S. forces in Lebanon on the *offensive.*

WHO'S WHO

Advocates of a congressional pay raise are finding it difficult to deal with **Barney Frank**'s admission that he could afford to spend $20,000 on a male prostitute. . . .

Don't assume **John Sununu** is safely ensconced at the White House simply because he doesn't seem to have created any serious disturbances in recent months. A well-informed source predicts that Sununu's mean, abusive streak is bound to emerge sooner or later as an embarrassment to the administration. Then, our source says, it will be a matter of weighing the severity of the embarrassment against the enormous debt Bush owes Sununu for engineering the victory in New Hampshire that put the president's campaign back on the tracks after its derailment in Iowa. . . .

William Reilly's leadership of the EPA has won the admiration of both the White House and the environmentalists. . . .

The principal sources for the devastating portrait of **Dan Quayle** in *Whose Broad Stripes and Bright Stars?* by **Jack Germond** and **Jules Witcover** were **Joe Canzeri** and **Jim Lake**, two of the veteran Republican workers who were assigned to handle Quayle during the campaign. Both men have an excellent reputation for truthfulness. . . .

Ronald Reagan lives on in Washington. **Louis Cordia** of the Reagan Appointee Alumni Association was recently quoted as saying that "13 of 13 assistants to Bush served under Reagan, as has half the cabinet, and 30 to 35 percent of the sub-cabinet.". . .

A romance between Congress and the administration? Not only that, but between Democrat and Republican as well. A prominent senator and a sub-cabinet official are said to be involved. . . .

Gail Wilensky, Bush's choice to administer Medicare and Medicaid, is the author of a study that shows the government spends "about the same on [health care for] the poor and near poor as it does on the middle-income and high-income population.". . .

Senate Majority Leader **George Mitchell** said in late August that nearly eight months after he took office the president had failed to make nominations for nearly half the full-time positions in executive agencies that require Senate confirmation. The White House countered by accusing the Senate of failing to confirm 115 nominees whose names had been sent to it. But even by the White House's own count, the Bush administration has not even provided nominees for 117 top jobs. . . .

In—*Defense:* Secretary of Army—**Michael P. Stone**. Secretary of Navy—**H. Lawrence Garrett III**. Undersecretary of Navy—**J. Daniel Howard**. Assistant Secretary for Export Administrations—**Quincy M. Krosby**. General Counsel—**Terrence O'Donnell**. *Education:* General Counsel—**Ed Stringer**. *Housing and Urban Development:* Assistant Secretary for Housing and Federal Housing Commissioner—**C. Austin Fitts**. Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs—**Sherrie Sandy Rollins**. *Interior:* Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks—**Constance B. Harriman**. Assistant Secretary for Territorial and International Affairs—**Stella G. Guerra**. Assistant Secretary for Policy on Budget and Administration—**Lou Gallegos**. Solicitor—**Martin L. Allday**. *Justice:* Assistant Attorney General for Land and Natural Resources— **Richard B. Stewart**. *Labor:* Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training Services—**Tom Collins**. Assistant Secretary for Employment Standards Administration—**William C. Brooks**. *State:* Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs—**Elizabeth M. Tamposi**. Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security—**Sheldon J. Krys**. *Agencies and Commissions:* Member, Securities Exchange Commission—**Richard C. Breeden**. Deputy Director of Arms Control and Disarmament Agency—**Stephen Read Hamner**. Administrator, Maritime Administration—**Warren G. Leback**. Member, Nuclear Regulatory Commission—**Forrest J. Remick**.

Out—*Commerce:* Assistant Secretary for Shipbuilding and Logistics—**Everett Pyatt**.

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This fatal new military involvement came in connection with fighting between Lebanese government troops and Druze forces at the Shouf village of Suq-al-Gharb. In the second week of September, McFarlane became convinced that the fighting at Suq-al-Gharb was an all-or-nothing Druze offensive, and that if the Lebanese army was not strongly supported by American firepower in response, the town and even the government itself might, as he put it in a message back to the White House, be routed "within 24 hours." In making his request to Washington for U.S. artillery and tactical aircraft to support the Lebanese army at Suq-al-Gharb, McFarlane also passed along reports of Palestinian and Iranian fighters joining the fight on the side of the Druze, reports fed to him by Lebanese government and army officials.

What McFarlane was now asking for went far beyond anything the U.S. military in Lebanon had done before. The Druze that McFarlane decided to attack at Suq-al-Gharb weren't firing at the U.S. It was no longer a question of using U.S. forces to stop the war in Lebanon. McFarlane now wanted them to *join* it. In doing so, he would be obliterating the Marines' last pretense of bipartisanship. Could any Lebanese Moslem now be expected to remain neutral towards them?

The estimates of the opposing force's size that McFarlane passed on to Washington proved to be wildly exaggerated, and no hard evidence of significant Palestinian or Iranian involvement in the fighting at Suq-al-Gharb was ever found. And as for the imminence of it all, well, Suq-al-Gharb never fell. Not in 24 hours, not in 24 days. Indeed, as of September 1989, it still hadn't fallen.

Neutrality in shreds

At Suq-al-Gharb, McFarlane may have consciously manipulated his accounts of the situation to further unleash his own desires for battle. Or he may have been misled by the Phalangists.

Or perhaps he just panicked. After all, since coming to Lebanon, he'd been operating constantly on adrenaline and two hours' sleep. And despite the low-key monotone the press knew him by, those who worked around McFarlane knew that he had in fact always been the antithesis of the cool operator. Referring to McFarlane's later suicide attempt in the wake of the Iran-Contra scandal, one NSC source thinks Lebanon was where McFarlane "first began to become unwrapped."

Before McFarlane could engineer his disastrous military expansion at Suq-al-Gharb, he had a two-fold bureaucratic problem: 1) The "rules of engagement" under which the deployed American forces were operating—dictated by the constraints imposed by the War Powers Act—only permitted hostile fire as a means of self-defense; and 2) All requests for gunfire support had to come from the top Marine commander at the airport, Colonel Timothy Geraghty. McFarlane finessed 1) by stressing for Washington the idea that Suq-al-Gharb was the linchpin for the security of the American forces in Lebanon. Handling 2) required him to go toe-to-toe with Geraghty.

It was quite a struggle. The Marine commander who knew in his bones that calling U.S. fire into the hills would seal the fate of his men, trying to hold off the former artillery officer who seemed to think he was back in his old Marine job, not heading up a negotiating team.

It took a week of shouting matches, with McFarlane frequently using his role as presidential envoy to invoke the wishes of the "Commander-in-Chief." This made it particularly hard for Geraghty since nobody else talking to him was purporting to represent this ultimate level of authority. In a heated phone call with either McFarlane or McFarlane's military advisor (accounts vary), Geraghty shouted that if U.S. fire was used to support the Lebanese army, "we'll get slaughtered."

But Geraghty was in effect arguing with the White House. Moreover, it had to cross his mind that he would be in big trouble if he refused to order the supporting fire and the Lebanese army was then overrun. He finally gave in.

On September 19, a cruiser, two destroyers, and a frigate fired 338 five-inch rounds into the mountains above the airport. The last shreds of Marine neutrality were destroyed with the first naval salvo. The Marine unit's official report of the day's events marked the disastrous turn of events with a subtle change: that day, for the first time, it referred to the antigovernment forces as the "enemy."

The fuse was white-hot now. And short.

A month later, 241 Marines and their four-story building disappeared beneath the towering toadstool. Their average age was 19.

As for Bud McFarlane, he got a promotion. He went on to become National Security Advisor, and, in that post, brought us Iran-Contra. Last year, he pled guilty to four counts of withholding information from Congress. Though he's out of the government (and the psychiatric wing) now, you can still catch him on the evening news. There before Robert MacNeil's respectful gaze, discoursing on world affairs. I tried to reach him for this story, but he was busy. Traveling in Europe. ❑

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ON POLITICAL BOOKS

IT'S NOT NICE TO FOOL MOTHER NATURE

Bill McKibben's warnings about global warming, genetic engineering, and the albatross of materialism are at once gentle and startling. But what's so bad about penicillin?

by Gregg Easterbrook

*The End of Nature** has become, prior to publication, one of the fall's big books principally on the expectation that it will argue that everything about the environment is horrifying beyond reprieve, a thought that packages well, and appeals to media bookers. It is being promoted as *The Fate of the Earth* comes to the environment. *The End of Nature* has little relation with the hype package that accompanies it. The book does not call the earth doomed, though McKibben, a former *New Yorker* writer who specializes in environmental affairs, is glum about several current ecological trends, particularly global warming. Nor will readers find it a brooding, strident tract. *The End of Nature* is instead a gentle, splendid book written in an unfailingly reasonable tone, enriched by many touches of warmth and affectionate wit.

"If the temperature [is] increasing a degree per decade," McKibben writes, "the forest surrounding my [northern New York State] home would be due at the Canadian border sometime around 2020." And McKibben calls Thomas Midgley, the General Motors chemist who invented both chlorofluorocarbons and tetraethyl lead gasoline additives, the one "who may now hold the record for most banned substances produced by a single man." He devotes a delightful paragraph to military ruminations over whether global warming, by shrinking the polar ice cap that Soviet nuclear missile submarines use for cover, will confer an advantage on the U.S.

Parts of *The End of Nature* were composed during the 1988 summer heat wave and thus reflect last year's conventional wisdom that 1988 marked the beginning of the end. Since the book went to press during an unusually cool summer, it probably will be needled in some quarters on the contention that 1989 debunks the greenhouse effect, though statistically neither year proves either case.

Conventional wisdom does sometimes handicap McKibben's thinking. He repeatedly declares that weather changes are "permanent" or "irrevocable," that "no normal situation" can ever return. These assertions fit squarely in the cultural tradition of success-through-doomsday prophecy, but I found them hard to swallow even as a believer that the greenhouse effect is a genuine cause for alarm. On global warming and ozone layer depletion, McKibben believes that all negative environmental and social trends in effect today are unalterable and can be reliably projected out into the future, while discarding the possibility that new ideas, inventions, social norms, or natural phenomena will rise up in opposition.

In the main, however, *The End of Nature* takes an admirably nuanced view of the earth's affairs. McKibben is careful to acknowledge the arguments against environmental panic, an extreme sacrilege among environmentalists, and he shows charity toward the great mass of humanity that generates the core problem, whereas most environmental writing perches on the notion that all except the eco-enlightened are monsters and oafs.

The "end of nature" that the author decrees—he says it's already occurred—does not mean destruction of the ecosphere or cessation of life but rather the passing of earth's temporal arrangements as they have arisen spontaneously, unperturbed by conscious design. McKibben says, for example, that although many of the forests man has cut may someday be replanted, they can never again be "natural"—the next generation of redwoods will grow in neat rows,

Gregg Easterbrook is a contributing editor of Newsweek, *the* Atlantic, *and* The Washington Monthly.

* *The End of Nature.* Bill McKibben. *Random House, $19.95.*

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plunked down by mechanical planters, instead of springing up at random. He posits, grudgingly, that global warming and ozone depletion might be controlled by technology. But to McKibben, the thought of such "ecological management" is abhorrent, since even if successful it would still be artificial. "Environmentally sound is not the same as natural," he protests, objecting also to hydroelectric power, the most benign form of power available to current society. Hydro reservoirs in Quebec "have altered an area larger than Switzerland," McKibben writes disdainfully, with the simple fact of alteration being damning to him. This leads to the first of three shortcomings in McKibben's analysis.

To gator glory

First he argues, in effect, that for most of the ecosphere only pure preservation—not building or moving a thing—would have been responsible on man's part. But since for a substantial portion of the world's surface the opportunity for pure preservation passed long ago, this is little more useful than arguing that Europe would be a nicer place to live if Napoleon had not started his wars. *The End of Nature* accepts that cleanups and restoration projects mean little because, once land or water has been touched by man, it is impossible to return to the metaphysically superior "nature" state. Perhaps. But here McKibben has inadvertently provided an argument that we might as well go on paving. If nature is already ruined for good, why shouldn't humans amuse themselves by doing as they please to the landscape?

Second, McKibben discards the notion that man's own existence is part of nature: our being derived from the natural scheme just as the being of any fish or fowl; our interventions more dramatic in scale but no different in concept from those of the beaver that drowns out a meadow habitat when it dams a stream, or the climax trees that take over a forest and cut off smaller plants' access to sunlight, and so on.

"Deep" ecologists are often accused of taking an antihuman line because they dislike or at least can't deal with their fellow man. *The End of Nature* betrays some of this sentiment by calling grizzly bears "the continent's grandest mammals," a description with which I beg to differ. McKibben admiringly quotes the naturalist John Muir writing of the alligator, "Honorable representatives of the great saurians of older creation, may you long enjoy your lilies and rushes, and be blessed now and then with a mouthful of terror-stricken man by way of dainty!" Thinking that man should avoid slaughtering alligators or destroying their habitats is one thing; thinking that it is an amusing act of justice that a "terror-stricken" person—in practice, usually a small child—occasionally gets ripped to shreds by one of these predators is quite another. If it's wrong for humans to kill alligators, the reverse also applies.

Then again, in the unspoiled realm that *The End of Nature* extols, killing is not wrong but, rather a way of life. "Wrong" is an invention of human intellect, a perturbation in the naturally amoral universe. In places McKibben tries to have it both ways, simultaneously saying that man's existence is unnatural and objectionable and yet that the unique human conscience ought to bind man's behavior. Either people are fundamentally part of nature, in which case our sprawl across the globe, for all its faults, must in some fundamental sense reflect a fruition of natural impetus, or are unnatural, in which case any kind of appeals to human higher instincts, such as in *The End of Nature*, are inherently preposterous.

But McKibben seems a peaceful and God-fearing person, declaring himself a practicing Methodist; there is some discussion of religious values in *The End of Nature*, though the book does not attempt to address the question of whether God is a component of pure nature or another mettlesome intellect. So a more likely explanation for McKibben's mild antihuman bias is the common, and understandable, desire to be alone with nature. He devotes several sections to sympathetic descriptions of outdoorsmen or eccentrics who spend extended periods of time completely withdrawn from human contact, reveling in being the sole person on a mountain trail. He admits to harboring some desire that everyone else would vamoose from the woods around his Adirondack home, the better for his appreciation of unspoiled majesty. As anyone who has ever had the opportunity to behold the deep wilderness or far islands can attest, a sudden, almost irrationally intense irritation with the thought that any other person might be within miles is nearly impossible to combat.

It is fair, of course, to condemn as unnatural humanity's innumerable foolish and environmentally damaging acts. But to reject human existence and intelligence as part of nature does nature an injustice. McKibben's thesis that any human invention, even an environmentally sound one, is metaphysically undesirable left me wondering what medicines he would permit his wife to have were she dying. Penicillin? It can be found in a pure-natural, spontaneously occurring state, though that form is so exceptionally toxic some people die from allergic reactions. (Dangerous chemicals are manufactured naturally, too—among them carbon dioxide, the key greenhouse gas, whose annual natural production exceeds artificial emission by about 30 to 1.) Ampicillin? Penicillin analogs like this are less harsh but cannot be found in nature.

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Should she be allowed the synthesized chemicals of anesthesia? Should children be allowed to have the Sabin vaccine, since it involves artificial denaturing of the polio virus and furthermore disrupts the life cycle and natural propagation of a spontaneously arising form of RNA?

Surely the pure-nature response would be, "Let her die, death happens all the time in nature and it doesn't matter one damn bit." Somehow I doubt McKibben could bring himself to say such words. And I wonder why it seems to move him so little that humanity, for all its shortcomings and hypocrisies, has at least introduced into the natural scheme the concept that suffering and pointless dying ought to be opposed.

Wardrobe woes

McKibben is particularly anxious about genetic engineering, feeling that even if all goes well and this science is used only constructively (for instance to eliminate the need to administer vaccines), engineered people, plants, and animals will lose life's transcendental stature. Why? Nature conducts genetic engineering experiments on a continual basis; every creature that exists today is the result of one. Had genetic changes somehow been banned, say, 20 million years ago, not only would humans now not be present to worry about global warming, virtually all the current species whose right to exist we worry about preserving would not exist to be preserved.

Finally McKibben slips through the intellectual trap door of complaining about the effects of current political and social policies but offering no concrete alternatives. *The End of Nature* proffers the idea that, in general, people ought to restrict their lifestyles and burn less fossil fuel. Otherwise it provides few specifics beyond declaring that the author and his wife keep their home at 55 degrees in winter, "shop [only] 12 times a year," and "try very hard not to think about how much we'd like a baby." To save gasoline, "there are weeks when we do not venture out [of the house] at all."

Okay, but on those monthly shopping trips, what do the McKibbens purchase? Products of modern industry would be my guess; for instance, the author concedes he recently acquired a fax machine. Practically all products available in today's stores—even organic produce, stone ground bread, and handmade wool sweaters—involve, at some level, raw materials consumption and manufacturing processes that disrupt the immaculate form of nature McKibben believes in. McKibben defends his fax as, well, environmentally sound because such devices cut down on fuel used to deliver physical mail. But they still must be built in factories, consume plastic and metals, rely on toxic chemicals for exposing fax images, and be powered by electricity that usually comes from burning fossil fuels or uranium. And those products the McKibbens do buy could neither be made nor distributed if the typical U.S. worker did not venture out of his house.

It's true that any one individual boycotting industry by refusing to purchase fax machines, Endust, or anything else would have zero effect. But if the results of even environmentally managed industrial activity are as dreadful as this book defines them, doesn't *any* acquiescence to the system—even so much as purchasing *The End of Nature*, made from felled trees treated with bulk acids, distributed by trucks burning fossil fuels—become a moral offense, impermissible regardless of magnitude?

Consider this section from *The End of Nature* on fuel conservation: "To cope with the greenhouse effect, people may need to install more efficient washing machines. But if you buy such a machine and yet continue to feel it's both your right and your joy to have a big wardrobe, then the essential momentum of our course won't be broken. . . . On the other hand, you could slash your stock of clothes to a comfortable or even uncomfortable minimum, then chip in with your neighbors to buy a more efficient washing machine to which you would lug your dirty laundry." Don't you generate about the same volume of laundry whether you have five shirts in rotation or 500? Isn't the fuel expenditure going to be about the same whether one common washing machine chugs all day long or lots of individual household machines run intermittently?

I caution that the above passage is about the weakest one in a book normally characterized by insight, calm reflection, and impressive reasoning. It also occurs in the context of a beautifully written argument that materialism is an albatross around humanity's neck. Moving away from materialism, McKibben says, "is disturbing in a way that an idea, say, like Marxism is not. It is not all that radical to talk about who is going to own the factories, at least compared to the question of whether there are going to *be* factories." Regardless of whether the environment would be helped, diminished desire for material things would be good for our souls, reason enough to dream of smaller wardrobes and fewer shopping trips.

But how are such goals to be accomplished? Westerners are currently programmed for materialism, Third Worlders are programmed for overpopulation, and nearly all earth's pristine acres have already, for good or ill, been touched by the hand of man. It's not enough to proclaim wistfully that human behavior toward nature must change. Specific reforms that can actually be put into practice by real-world political systems are what the environment needs today. ❑

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Public affairs books scheduled to be published this month.

What Should We Tell Our Children About Vietnam? William McCloud. *University of Oklahoma Press, $17.95.* In February 1987, Bill McCloud, a junior-high-school teacher in Pryor, Oklahoma, decided that the time had come to teach students about Vietnam. McCloud, a veteran of the war, found few teaching aids, so he wrote to a variety of people connected with the conflict—cabinet officers, generals, pilots, and protestors—asking what they thought was most important to teach about the war. More than 120 people wrote back, including George Bush, Dean Rusk, Henry Kissinger, McGeorge Bundy, and even the notoriously uncommunicative Robert McNamara. Now, with this slim volume, we, like Oklahoma's students, have the benefit of their collective wisdom.

Alas, *What Should We Tell Our Children About Vietnam?* contains few revelations. Vietnam was so complex that even 800-page tomes have not been able to do it justice. Most of the letters in this volume come to no more than a few paragraphs and some only a few sentences. The book consequently reads like a collection of soundbites, or the history of Vietnam according to *USA Today*. Cliches abound. "Many precious American lives were lost," declares Jimmy Carter. "War is a terrible thing," announces Shelby Stanton, a Vietnam vet and military historian. Harry McPherson, special assistant to Lyndon Johnson, rues our "lack of a clear objective."

The collection is useful in one respect: It points to an emerging consensus about the war's key lessons. Cited most frequently is the notion that the United States should never again enter a war unless it's fully backed by Congress and the American people. This is endorsed by such hardliners as Caspar Weinberger, Ronald Ziegler, and John McCain. George Bush admits that the United States "misjudged" China's intentions, wrongly assuming that it was seeking to use the war to expand its influence throughout Southeast Asia. This amounts to a repudiation of the domino theory. Melvin Laird, Nixon's first secretary of defense, remarks that, had the nation heeded President Eisenhower's advice in 1955 not to become involved in a land conflict in Southeast Asia, "there would have been no Vietnam." Allen Ginsberg notes that the government was unable to understand what was going on in Vietnam because Joseph McCarthy had "knocked anyone who could speak Chinese out of the State department."

What is most exasperating about these letters is that both hawks and doves fail to take on the really challenging arguments confronting them. Liberals, while dwelling on the disastrous effects of our involvement in Indochina, pay little attention to the evil that ensued. The reeducation camps, the boat people, the extermination policies of the Khmer Rouge—all of this should trouble those who profess a concern for peace and human rights. It's quite plausible, of course, to argue that America could have done little about these horrors, but most of the doves represented in this book seem not even to care.

Similarly, conservatives, while moaning incessantly about our failure to take the war to Hanoi, never bother to examine the full implications of that position. "The only reason for entering a war is to overthrow a government that is doing something we cannot accept," writes Thomas H. Moorer, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "Consequently, the primary objective should have been to

The Dialectic in Journalism

Toward a Responsible Use of Press Freedom

John C. Merrill

Over the past thirty years John C. Merrill has produced what many critics consider an essential body of writing on the relatedness of journalism and philosophy. Merrill's latest work, *The Dialectic in Journalism,* is a comprehensive examination of the forces at work throughout the press, focusing in particular on journalistic license and social control.

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overthrow Ho Chi Minh." Yeah, and then what? What puppet regime would we have installed to replace him? How long would we have had to occupy the country? What would we have done about the millions of heavily armed North Vietnamese roaming the countryside? The hawks never bother to pose such questions. No doubt because they have no answers.

—*Michael Massing*

The Resurgent Liberal (and other unfashionable prophecies). Robert Reich. *Times Books, $19.95.* Reich's hit parade of our economic follies are all on view in this lively collection of Reagan-era essays. It's a spectacle of myopia. Diapered MBAs and trembling CEOs shuffle zillions of dollars in paper while new products languish. The Pentagon devours the few engineers and scientists we turn out, dooming our shrinking R&D efforts to commercial irrelevance. The government, meanwhile, fights yesterday's "us versus them" battles, imposing quotas to stem a tide of imports that include American companies' offshore production. Who's "us" anyway, Reich asks, when there's more American workmanship in today's Tennessee-built Nissan than in today's offshore Buick?

Reich's most compelling (and frequently repeated) theme stresses skilled labor as our only likely source of sustainable advantage in a global low-wage marketplace. But realizing this potential requires a brave new workplace—one where managers issue fewer commands and share more information and where broader incentives (like employee ownership) give all in the enterprise a shared stake in success. Above all, however, the skills of skilled labor depend on education and training, an area we continue to leave unreformed despite the usual sound and fury.

Several of Reich's pieces shed light on the symbolic costs that come with seemingly positive policy changes. He notes, for example, that tax reform's scrapping of progressive tax rates and the earlier move to a voluntary army both eroded the democratic values of shared sacrifice.

One quarrel: Like many writers infatuated with a thought, Reich has an irritating habit of recycling pet phrases. We're told several times, for example, that yesterday's "muckrakers" are today's "investigative journalists." So read these essays, but not in one sitting.

—*Matthew Miller*

All By Myself: The Unmaking of a Presidential Campaign. Chris Black, Tom Oliphant. *Globe Pequod Press, $19.95.* In case you're still wondering, it was all Michael Dukakis's fault.

Boston Globe reporters Chris Black and Tom Oliphant have confected a campaign melodrama about the very best efforts of John Sasso, Susan Estrich, Tubby Harrison, Jack Corrigan, Tom Kiley, Nick Mitropoulos et al to guide the Massachusetts Governor into the White House in spite of himself. The basic ingredients of *All By Myself* are the Dukakis team's memoranda and sideline whispers. The field and fund-raising operations weathered the sudden departure of John Sasso, and the lock-'em-up-early delegate strategy, outlined by a primaries prodigy aptly named Tad Devine, worked to perfection.

But Estrich and Kiley labored in vain to get the Democratic nominee-apparent to develop a catchy theme. "Competence" was not only dull, they argued, but it also invited opponents to exploit the tiniest flaws in the governor's decades-long record of policy decisions. In May 1988, the Dukakis high command anticipated the Bush attacks on prison furloughs and the Pledge of Allegiance. But their suggested alternatives to "competence" came back from Dukakis with "a curt, almost always unexplained rejection: I'm not going to do that, guys. That's not me."

The best chapter of the book exhumes the fall advertising campaign. The spin doctors called in David F. D'Alessandro, a "proactive" executive from John Hancock Insurance, for which he created the glossily gritty "Real Life, Real Answers" series of commercials. D'Alessandro strode into Dukakis headquarters and found 1,200 scripts for unproduced television spots strewn across desktops and planters. Taking control from the linear thinkers, he concocted a series that would feature two fictional Bush packagers, a cynical pair of white guys who manipulate their candidate but fail to fool the American people. Too many aides feared too many viewers wouldn't get it, so only one installment aired.

Amid the disarray, the candidate asks his advisers if he should be known as Mike or Michael. A rare consensus quickly emerges: Michael will make him seem bigger.

The other high point of the book, its account of the Biden Videotape Crisis, details a similar frenzy of image consciousness. This section will thrill campaign volunteers who have dreamt about having an impact on political history. Black and Oliphant trace the death of one candidacy and the decapitation of another to the pivotal behavior of a Dukakis *intern*. Second thoughts about making a tape juxtaposing Joseph Biden's speech with its Neil Kinnock progenitor led the intern to tell Dukakis press secretary Patricia O'Brien that Sasso had commissioned the deed. At the time, it was widely speculated—even in Dukakis headquarters—that it was someone in the Gephardt campaign who had given such a tape to *The New York Times*. But once alerted, O'Brien pressured Sasso. So did a *Time* story and phone inquiries from *The Washington Post* and *The Boston Globe*. By the time Sasso confessed to Dukakis, the candidate was on record as saying he would "probably" fire anyone in his employ who engaged in dirty politics. Sasso stayed, then left to spare Dukakis the trauma of having to fire him.

But like Dukakis, *All By Myself* also falters in its analysis of the campaign and election. The Dukakis advisors appear prescient, unanimous, and unerring in their recommendations to the obstinate candidate. This may have been true in August 1988, when every Democrat in America longed for the presidential nominee to quit diddling with his state duties so that he could counter the Republican assault. Yet the "perfect staff" effect is also a fiction of the campaign melodrama genre, wherein every phone call brings a message on which the contest will turn. And many interpretive and explanatory passages smack of reporter-source coziness, especially the description of John Sasso as he returns to the campaign helm after 11 months on Elba.

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The authors ask us to make sense of the rise and fall of Team Dukakis through the prism of a "Scenes From a Marriage" theory: Michael brought the executive skills, John supplied the passion and savvy; during crises, John adapted but Michael denied; left alone, Michael reeled, and John came back too late to save him. Given this approach, it is somewhat odd that the book provides less personal detail about Sasso and the admittedly high-profile Dukakis than about Willie Horton.

What is worse, *All By Myself* doesn't give outside and impersonal forces due consideration. Dukakis certainly deserves blame. But the authors underappreciate his brusque "That's not me" dismissals of staff suggestions. Like any veteran campaigner, he should have had final authority as to what he could pull off as a performer; advice that asked him to violate his sense of his public self cannot be regarded as sound, even if it seems abstractly appropriate in narrative hindsight. Since the debates revealed that he couldn't stretch his persona even when he had agreed to do so, it strikes me as unreasonable to argue that he should have changed when and as his staff saw fit.

The evidence of Sasso and Company's foresight impresses. Yet surely a campaign that generated 1,200 ad scripts also produced a surfeit of other memoranda. The options Dukakis rejected that would not have worked should have been analyzed here, too. As the chapter on advertising demonstrates, such options make the report both livelier to read and truer to life.

Black and Oliphant show us little more than the figure of Michael Dukakis standing between the staff and victory in late September. For the sake of argument, let us suppose the staff did have the power to breathe vitality and wit into the candidate during his public performances. Must we also assume that the Bush team would have failed to adjust its strategy and tactics? Would the Republicans have ignored their previous experience and sat on their resource advantages, including the powers of incumbency?

Who are they trying to kid? Do they wish to torture that intern with guilt?

Media skills are as much a part of the presidency as they are of the cam-

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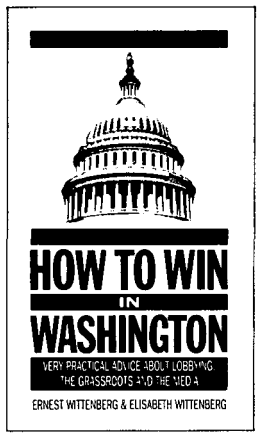

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paign. Michael Dukakis, this book makes clear, has the rhetorical ability to impress bright liberals—and not much else. When his current term as governor expires, he should consult, teach, write, and otherwise serve as a moderator of the same discussions about national affairs that he is too stiff a man to dominate.

—*Michael Cornfield*

Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972. Stephen Ambrose. *Simon and Schuster, $24.95.* The press has lately gone anniversary-mad, making up for the tedium of domestic peace and (relative) prosperity by commemorating such colorful events of the recent past as Woodstock and the Apollo moon landing. Strangely, however, the 15th anniversary of another dramatic event in the lives of newspaper-and-magazine-buying baby boomers—the resignation of President Richard Nixon—attracted little notice. Whatever the reason, publishing houses are now stepping in to fill in the gap. Several Nixon biographies are due out this fall, starting with Ambrose's book, the second in a three-volume work.

Today Nixon is often portrayed as a borderline-respectable figure ("He's Back!" according to a *Newsweek* cover story in May 1986), but *The Triumph of a Politician* shows that reporters had it right the first time. Nixon criminally abused the powers of his office, prolonged the Vietnam war to no advantage, and further polarized a badly divided nation. It's hard to see how revisionist history could plausibly alter this interpretation, and Ambrose is no revisionist; he admits he shouted "napalm" and "body count" during a 1970 speech Nixon gave at Kansas State University. The author of an admiring biography of Dwight Eisenhower, Ambrose never misses a chance to contrast Nixon's paranoid style with Eisenhower's soldierly self-confidence. His best example comes from Eisenhower's last press conference, when the president was asked whether reporters had been fair to him. Eisenhower answered with words Nixon could never have uttered: "I don't see what a reporter could do much to a president, do you?"

Despite Ambrose's obvious antipathy for Nixon (and what appears to be downright hatred of Henry Kissinger), this is a responsible work that avoids the gratuitous smears that have marred much writing about Nixon in the past (especially Fawn Brodie's Nixon biography). Ambrose gives Nixon his due for his two acknowledged accomplishments—normalizing relations with China and establishing detente with the Soviet Union—and is even somewhat compassionate about Nixon's struggle to keep both Left and Right happy with his policy of "Vietnamization."

Still, a subject as rich as Nixon deserves exhaustive, Robert Caro-like legwork that Ambrose is unwilling to provide. Admittedly, Nixon would have been hard to bag for an interview, but Ambrose scarcely talked to anybody; he conducted only 20 interviews for his first two volumes. The bulk of his information came from sifting through the archival record (from which Nixon's lawyers have withheld the juiciest documents) and previous books and news accounts. As a result, Ambrose breaks little new ground. What's more, he is unable to give his subject the sort of flesh-and-blood vividness a Caro might provide. " I confess that I do not understand this complex man," he writes at the beginning of volume two. Alas, after reading this book, neither do I.

—*Timothy Noah*

Just Enough Rope. Joan Braden. *Villard, $18.95.* Poor Joan Braden has a serious problem. She knows nothing about sex. Nada, zip, zero, zilch. Passion and the pleasures of the flesh have miraculously eluded this woman of a certain age who has spent a little time flirting, courting, and globe-trotting with some of the world's most attractive and, of course, important men. But the trouble is not just Braden's lack of carnal knowledge. It is that she has chosen to disclose her ignorance, along with her climb to the parlors, and perhaps, the bedrooms, of the mighty, by writing a book about it. Posing as a breathless chronicler of the great, glamorous, and powerful, who run the nation's capital, she has penned a coy and name-dropping memoir, *Just Enough Rope.* (The title, from a Dorothy Parker poem, describes the latitude her husband has allowed her in her pursuit of the power elite.)

If you doubt my veracity on Joan's ignorance of the birds and the bees, listen to this:

"I like warmth on a cold night as well as the next person. But I don't know a thing about sex. Despite having eight children, I don't know as much as the next person. Because the next person always seems to know and confide in me that they know all manners of mysteries and techniques. Particularly men. And men assume, I don't know why, that I must know all these mysteries and techniques. . . . the correct arrangement of lights, the eroticism of perfume, the sensualness of clothing, the gentle touch of fingers. Why do they assume it? I don't know. David Bruce [the patrician ambassador to the Court of St. James under Kennedy] used to suggest during quiet dinners that I was a walking encyclopedia on these matters. And when I told him I wasn't, that I didn't know any more about it than a girl on spring vacation, he dropped the pretense of polish which had distinguished him for 50 years in at least five diplomatic posts. 'All right,' he said. 'You're an ignoramus. Then let's have a toss in the hay.' "

At this point there is no swell of music or graceful fade to black. Instead, Braden announces that David Bruce was far too courtly and experienced to be caught in such an ungentlemanly act; but that, Tom, her husband of 40 years was not. Unsophisticated, inexperienced Tom, she feels compelled to divulge, was a definite "hay tosser."

Deploring monogamy, Braden, a former Rockefeller aide, Kennedy campaign aide, Kissinger friend and hostess, public relations consultant, and wife of syndicated columnist Tom Braden, portrays herself as the perpetual *jeune fille*, chaste, yet irresistible to men, whose only aim is to gain entree to the smart set. As she puts it, "Joannie wants to get to go." This is her personal best.

The dilemma she faces is that she wants to go everywhere. To attend every glitzy party, meet every famous male—occasionally a female—while leaving her children at home and dragging her often disgruntled and impecunious husband in her deter-

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mined wake.

What Braden unwittingly reveals is that she is an ambitious, or upwardly mobile man-izer. Her book is a series of close encounters—part feckless who-done-it, part embarrassing kiss-but-don't-tell. The question throughout the vacuous slim volume is: Who did she, or didn't she, do IT with, and above all, why should we care?

Let's start with powerful man number one, her original mentor, the late Nelson Rockefeller. Braden began her professional career working for Rockefeller and continued to do so on and off throughout his lifetime. Rockefeller introduced Joan to her husband, Tom, a former CIA agent, and ultimately launched him as a journalist by giving him money to buy a newspaper in Oceanside, California.

As Braden likes to tell it, Rockefeller's interest went way beyond office chitchat. "My lack of sophistication appealed to him, and I sensed that it made me physically attractive. But I couldn't do anything about it. I was what I was. . . . straight, untutored, virginal." When he propositioned her in the office, she feigned outrage. On another occasion she asked if she could use his shower, and when he decided to join her, she did what every well brought-up young girl would have done: jumped out, toweled off, and headed straight for the nearest party.

Powerful man number two: Bobby Kennedy. She describes being with RFK in an Indianapolis motel room the evening of the day Martin Luther King was shot. "There was a knock on the door. It was Bobby. He looked at me saying nothing and pulled his tie off. He put his arms around me and pulled me down on the bed alongside him and we lay there for a long while and cried. Yes, I love Tom. Yes, I've always loved him. . . . But to say that because you love your husband, it's impossible to love another man is as silly as to say that because you love your son, it's impossible to love your daughter."

After this ingenuous statement it is probably time to enlighten the reader on the Bradens' unique philosophy of marriage. Joan's observation that it is different from most other unions is surprisingly accurate. "If I want to consort with another man I do. And if [Tom] wants to consort with another woman he does. We trust each other. We have too much respect for each other's individuality to want to destroy it by fixing boundaries on friendships and the developments of friendships. So we give each other total freedom. . . trusting in each other's honor, love, and sense of courtesy."

Discourtesy chez Braden means indiscretion and is to be avoided if possible. So we're supposed to believe this happy couple has sailed blithely along, always trusting, *never cheating*, and, above all, never, never, asking a leading question, like, "What did you do today, dear?" The latter, Braden informs us, would undoubtedly spoil her marriage.

Powerful man number three: Robert McNamara. "Am I keeping Robert McNamara from getting married?" ponders Braden in a chapter devoted solely to her "special" friendship with the former secretary of defense and head of the World Bank, a widower. They are such good friends that Braden says she plays the role of wife, and best of all, Joannie gets to go to some swell places. "[McNamara] attracts the attention of a certain number of women who are divorced or whose husbands have died and who wouldn't mind going along. And I'm the one that gets to go. Bob and I go to the Netherlands. We go to France. We go to Russia. We go to Greece. We go to Africa. We go wherever he has board meetings or seminars or speeches that interest me. In short, I have more fun with Bob McNamara than I do with anybody else in the world, sometimes but not always excepting my husband. As to whether I am keeping Bob McNamara from getting married, it worries me. What would I do without him?"

Powerful man number four: Kirk Douglas. Upon meeting the famous movie star, Braden became unbalanced and developed a chemical reaction. "Chemical reactions begin in the mind," she explains, "and move downward quite rapidly until you feel the tingling all the way to your toes. Suddenly as I was asking [Douglas] some trivial question, he turned to me, looked me full in the eyes and said, 'I want to be your best friend.' "

Alas, the whole experience was far more memorable to Braden than to Kirk Douglas. In his recent bestseller, *The Ragman's Son*, in which he tells all about the women he has known, Joan Braden does not warrant a mention.

Most of the rest of her work deals with evenings in Camelot and travels with the Kennedys; tea and fast repar-

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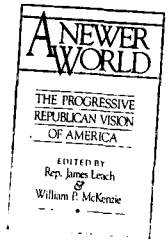

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tee with Alice Roosevelt Longworth; problems with her various jobs, as well as with her husband, children, and their innumerable exotic pets; and playing hostess for Henry Kissinger, which put her on the social map. She also wastes a lot of ink on dispensing advice under the heading, "Ancient Truths," with such sage suggestions as: Lie about your age. Never go to a dinner party when you're ill. Never tell a white lie. Don't use age as an excuse for not caring how you look. Her reasons are too puerile to explain. I feel for her family.

If you are wondering, as I am, what possessed Joan Braden to write a book, the answer lies in the foreword. In sum, for no apparent reason, she seems convinced that she is destined to play both role model and catalyst for other "average" but persistent women who—what else?—want to get to go.

"Whenever I tell a new friend or acquaintance a story about what I've seen or done, the new friend or acquaintance expresses astonishment."

—*Sandra McElwaine*

The Antagonists. James F. Simon. *Simon & Schuster, $19.95.* This is an absorbing and illuminating account of the intersecting lives of two giants of American law, Felix Frankfurter and Hugo Black. They were together on some of the most important decisions of their era—*Brown v. Board of Education*, where both were on the right side, and wartime relocation cases, where both were wrong. They split on crucial First Amendment issues during the forties and fifties. On these, Black was on the side of the angels, while Frankfurter committed error after error that will forever blight his otherwise distinguished record.

Many of the cases about which they disagreed involved communism in America. It wasn't that Frankfurter overestimated the Red Peril. He accurately described communist influence in this country as "puny." But he was convinced that if Congress found otherwise, the Court should defer to the wisdom of the legislature. There seems little doubt that Frankfurter was influenced in this view by his experience as an unofficial adviser to FDR in the early days of the New Deal when the Court was striking down measure after measure that Congress had enacted to try to rescue the country from the grip of the Depression. Looking back on those days, Frankfurter said to Richard Goodwin, who was one of his clerks: "I was appointed when this Court almost wrecked the country and itself by trying to substitute its economic views for those of the president and Congress. I'm not going to impose my views about communism on the rest of the country."

This view led Frankfurter to join six of his fellow justices in upholding the Smith Act, which made it a crime to teach communist doctrine (Black and William O. Douglas dissented). Congress, after all, had passed the Smith Act, however stupid and evil it might be, so intellectual consistency demanded that Frankfurter go along.

As he also remarked to Goodwin:

"It is what we mean by democratic government. I don't believe that when the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution they meant for basic questions of social and political policy to be decided by nine men in a secret conference on a Friday afternoon."

I think Frankfurter's democratic constitutional philosophy is absolutely right, except when the Bill of Rights is involved. Adopted by the Founding Fathers as a limit on the power of elected officials, it says these things you cannot do. And first among them is: "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech."

Surely, at minimum, this meant that the Congress should make no law limiting discussion of political ideas. We are a democracy except that no majority has the right to silence the voice of a minority or even of one individual.

There was one matter in which Black and Frankfurter agreed that I had forgotten but which is a great tribute to the humanity of both. They joined in opposing the execution of the Rosenbergs. I have always thought the Rosenbergs were guilty but that the death penalty was grotesquely wrong. Against this grave miscarriage of justice, these two great antagonists found common ground and fought the good fight together.

—*Charles Peters*

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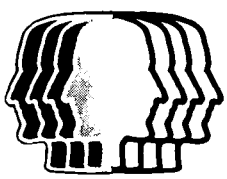

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